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**THE ANNALS OF
COVENT GARDEN THEATRE
VOL. I**

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From the Painting in the possession of His Honour Judge Wood

THE ANNALS OF
COVENT GARDEN THEATRE

FROM 1732 TO 1897

BY
HENRY SAXE WYNDHAM

AUTHOR OF "A MEMOIR OF SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN"



WITH 45 ILLUSTRATIONS

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I

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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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P R E F A C E

IN the following pages the writer desires to set forth as exactly and simply as possible the history and fortunes of the illustrious Playhouse which has for one hundred and seventy years borne the name of the famous Market within whose precincts it stands. The monumental work of the Rev. John Genest has been largely drawn upon, and no claim of originality is made therefore for the matter of the book, while the author is sadly aware of its many deficiencies in style. But the subject is fascinating enough for the story to bear retelling, while the temptations to deviate from the path to be followed are so numerous that the entire volume might easily be filled with the anecdotes, at once historical and romantic, that surround the history of the site alone. All this must be passed over, or little could be written upon the magnificent triumphs, great even when compared with those of later days, that had it for their scene during the early years of its existence. In its connection with the immortal Handel alone, there are the materials for chapters full of matter the most entrancing to all students

of musical history; while to do justice to the series of incomparable figures that have passed over its classic boards demands the glowing pen of a Clement Scott and the painstaking enthusiasm of a Boswell.

With the stately person of great Garrick at its head, there stretches down the century an illustrious and fascinating procession of all that was beautiful, witty, talented, and memorable in the twin arts of the drama and music. With the notable exceptions of Drury Lane, the Haymarket, and His Majesty's, there are few theatres in Europe, and none in England, that can boast of a longer or more unbroken series of noble productions. It is very certain that shrewd John Rich, when he contemplated the building of his new playhouse, can have had no inkling of the magnificent heritage he was preparing for his descendants and successors.

It was reserved for George Colman and Thomas Harris and his partners (little as the former deserved it) to render their reign at the theatre immortal, by producing the comedies of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

The early years of the nineteenth century beheld the first and irreparable fire, the historical "O. P." Riots, and last, but not least, the farewells of John Philip Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, and

Edmund Kean, and all that their names stand for in the history of the British drama. The short but eventful career of Alfred Bunn found the theatre for once under the same command as its great rival, and saw the engagement of Malibran. During the brilliant Vestris-Mathews management *London Assurance* was first produced, and the genius of Dion Boucicault was brought to light. Macready's management of the theatre saw some notable events, chief among them the first visit of Queen Victoria to Covent Garden and the birth of *Virginus* and the *Lady of Lyons*. Of the spacious period when Costa conducted, under the consummate management of Frederick Gye, there are still happily some among us who can give personal recollections.

1856 was the year of the second disastrous fire, and of the story of later years also "we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us."

The mere contemplation of such events should give any chronicler pause, and may well cause the present scribe to ask of his readers their most generous indulgence. He begs them to seek in the excellence of his intentions an excuse for their very inadequate performance.

The author owes a special debt of gratitude to W. J. Lawrence, Esq. (an authority on early

theatrical records), who freely placed at his disposal his MS. notes on Covent Garden history from 1732-61, compiled many years ago, but never before used for publication.

The writer is indebted to many other gentlemen for material assistance and valuable advice during the preparation of the book ; notably to His Grace the Duke of Bedford, whose Steward, Alfred Stutfield, Esq., most courteously gave permission and facilities to inspect early documents in his care ; to W. L. Spiers, Esq., the curator of the Soane Museum ; J. Weston Marchant, Esq., of the Bedford Estate Office, who most kindly photographed the deed from which the signature of John Rich under his portrait is copied ; to Dr. W. H. Cummings, F.S.A. ; W. T. Madge, Esq., of the *Globe* newspaper ; L. F. Chapuy, Esq. ; Wm. Douglas, Esq. ; Miss Agnes Gye ; Miss Clara E. Gye ; E. Fanning Gye, Esq. ; Hermann Klein, Esq., whose interesting "Thirty Years' Musical Reminiscences" have been freely quoted from ; A. H. Westcott, Esq. ; Ernest Gye, Esq. ; Charles W. Mathews, Esq., K.C. ; Dr. Scanes Spicer ; Mrs. Edward Terry ; Dr. C. W. Pearce ; Neil Forsyth, Esq. ; Ed. Wharton, Esq. ; J. S. Shedlock, Esq. ; and other gentlemen who kindly lent valuable books for purposes of reference, and helped in various ways.

A special tribute of thanks is due to C. H. Smith, Esq., to whose labour and valuable time the author owes the compilation of an excellent and comprehensive index.

To his Honour Judge Wood, to Mrs. Benson, and to T. Norton Longman, Esq., particular thanks are due for permission to reproduce the fine portraits (the first, third, and last-mentioned hitherto unpublished) of John Rich, his sons-in-law John Beard and James Bencraft, and of Thomas Harris respectively.

Without such kindly aid it would have been an infinitely harder task to complete such a book as the present; and it was not the least agreeable part of the work that it brought the writer into contact with so many personages as courteous as they are distinguished, and as learned in their various subjects as they are generous in assistance to humble workers in the same field.

H. SAXE WYNDHAM.

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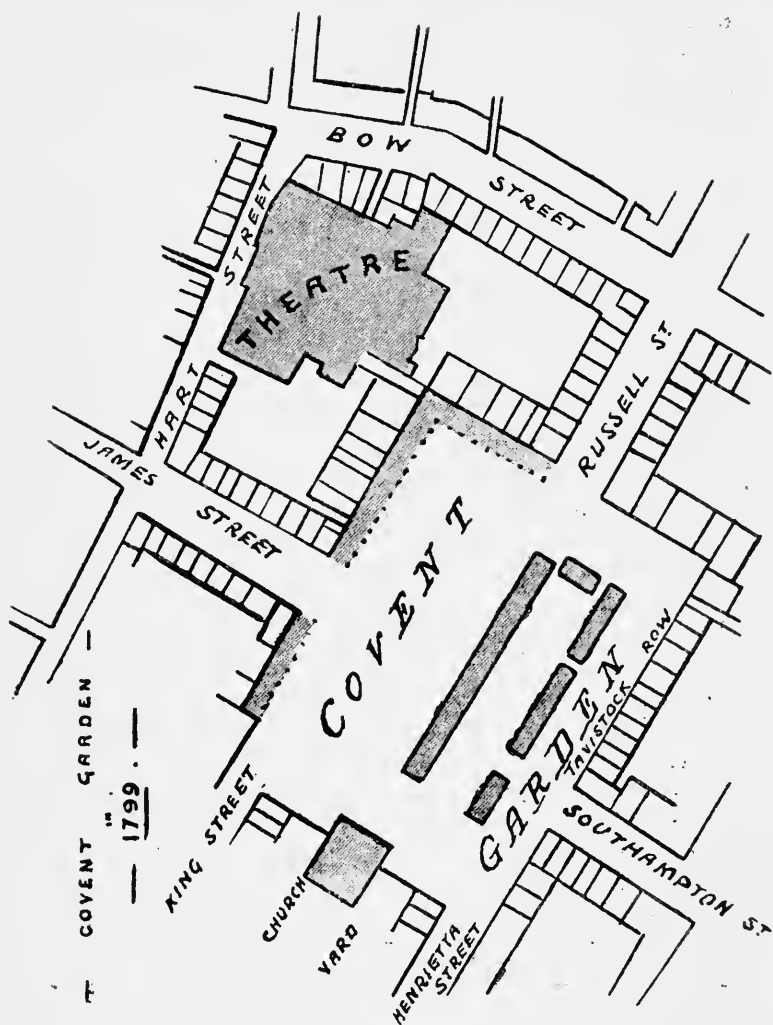
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COVENT GARDEN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS IN 1799.

THE ANNALS OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE

CHAPTER I

1732-1733

JOHN RICH, the founder of Covent Garden Theatre, was the son of Christopher Rich, who was described by Gildon, a contemporary dramatist, as “an old snarling lawyer, a waspish, ignorant pettifogger, who disregards the rights of all others”—a portrait that is apparently inspired by more personal animosity than is consistent with fair judgment. Christopher Rich was an attorney who, on March 24, 1688,* purchased for £80 a share in the patent of Drury Lane Theatre from the heirs of Sir William Davenant, to whom Charles II. had granted it, and from that time forward found his new investment so much more profitable and interesting than law, that he pursued it thenceforth to the entire exclusion of ordinary legal

* The “*Biographica Dramatica*” gives this date as 1690.

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business, though his training proved useful enough during the many lawsuits and processes he became involved in with his co-patentees, his company of actors, and others. It would be easy to fill a volume with the story of these difficulties; but they are not of special interest to us here, except as showing the environment of stage and court, respectively royal and legal, in which young John Rich, his son, was brought up.*

The latter must have been born about the year 1692 (if his age as given on his tomb be correct), four years after his father first entered into theatrical management.

In 1695 Christopher found a serious rival in Betterton, who opened the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, that was subsequently to come under the control successively of both Christopher and John Rich.

In 1705 another London theatre, destined to become famous, was opened in the Haymarket, and was known as the King's or Queen's Theatre, according to the sex of the reigning monarch; and this, owing to a combination of circumstances, also for a short time owned the sway of Christopher Rich. Unfortunately, however, there seems no doubt that from his avarice and meanness he

* No mention by any contemporary chronicler of his mother can be traced.

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was totally unfitted to cope successfully with the difficulties that invariably beset such a position, and in 1709 he had lost his hold upon both, and his patent was suspended.

Five years later the suspension was removed, and in 1714 he commenced to erect a new theatre upon the site of the old playhouse in Portugal Row, "Little Lincoln's Inn Fields."

On November 14 of that year he died, before the completion of his new theatre, and, in spite of the one or two commendatory notices which appeared, the verdict of posterity upon him cannot, we fear, be anything but a harsh one.

His son John first comes prominently before the public eye on December 18, 1714, a little over a month after his father's death, when, dressed in mourning, we find him speaking an elegiacal prologue to the opening play at the new theatre, of which he thenceforth assumed the command. The play was *The Recruiting Officer*, by Farquhar. The following year, 1715, Rich appeared for the only time in his life as a tragedian, a rôle in which, however, he did not shine, although he is said to have had a high opinion of his own abilities and to have declared to Jackson, the historian of the Scottish stage, that he would "rather play Cato to six persons in the pit than Harlequin to a crowded audience." Apparently his general education

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had been grossly neglected by his father,* for the various memoirs and writings of his contemporaries bristle with anecdotes of his ignorance. But in spite of his peculiarities, Rich was an excellent judge of the ability of an actor, although his real *forte* lay in the construction of pantomimes; and he must have been an admirable mechanic—no mean qualification for a theatre manager. According to Genest, his pantomimes nearly all enjoyed a run of forty or fifty nights, which would be regarded as a distinct proof of public favour even in these days. His acting as Harlequin was a thing to be remembered. His friend Jackson describes Rich going through detached scenes in his drawing-room for the purpose of teaching the “business” to an actor named Miles, who, though excellent in the line of “dumb show,” found it no easy matter to retain the lesson.

It was one of Rich’s particular hobbies to look upon himself as a trainer of raw material, a *penchant* which made him somewhat prone to encourage very mediocre performers, on the condition that they allowed him to impart the necessary tuition. When he confined himself to his own art, that of pantomime gesture, he not infrequently scored a success with his pupil.

* Although he certainly knew how to write, as may be seen by his signature to the lease, of which a portion is reproduced in facsimile.

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Woodward, one of his apprentices at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, was among the very few who were worthy of comparison with the master himself during his own lifetime. To his instructions also, we are told by Davies, "we owe a Hippisley, La Guerre, an Arthur, and Lalause; all excellent performers in these diverting mummeries."

Of these, John Arthur, the clown to Rich's Harlequin, earned some distinction as an actor of "old men," following in the footsteps of his predecessor Spiller. He wrote a ballad opera, and was otherwise remarkable for his mechanical ingenuity, an accomplishment that must have helped him to find favour in the eyes of Rich, himself a clever stage-carpenter.

Arthur eventually became manager of the Bath Theatre, and survived his old master eleven years, dying on April 8, 1772.

Among John Rich's "special turns" were a statue and a butterfly catching scene, and in his first pantomime, entitled *Harlequin Sorcerer*, there was an effective piece of "business" when Harlequin is hatched from an egg by the heat of the sun. "From the first chirping in the egg, his receiving motion, his feeling of the ground, standing upright, to his quick trip round the empty shell, through the whole progression every limb had its tongue, and every

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motion a voice, which spoke with most miraculous organ to the understanding and sensations of the observers." *

As a prominent man in the theatrical world, Rich was the object of a good many caricatures. From a satirical play by Murphy, published in 1786, we learn that he had an amiable weakness for cats,† as in one of the scenes he is discovered with a cat on his shoulder and another on his knee. An applicant for an engagement is shown in, who asks if he can come out that season. "Yes," says Lun (Rich), "if I can *larn* you." His stage name, "Lun," was taken from a famous Harlequin of the time in Paris.

Some of Rich's failings were of a less innocent character, and for these he was severely castigated by the lampoons and satires which, in the fashion of the time, referred to such matters with almost as much licence and coarseness as the sins they professed to rebuke possessed in themselves. In Fielding's *Tumble Down Dick* the Genius of Gin is made to rise out of a tub and address Harlequin in this strain—

"Thou shalt make jests without a head,
And judge of plays thou canst not read ;
Whores and racehorses shall be thine,
Champagne shall be thy only wine."

Pope also refers to the manager's well-known

* Jackson's "History of the Scottish Stage."

† Rich and his cats are again referred to on p. 78.



JOHN RICH AS HARLEQUIN, 1753.

From an Etching (artist unknown).

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penchant for the society of women of pleasure in the following lines—

“Ye gods ! shall Cibber’s son without rebuke,
Swear like a Lord, or Rich outwhore a Duke.”

After his father’s death, John Rich continued to manage his theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields for many years with considerable success, and thus began a career which always proved a sore trial to the older playhouse in Drury Lane. He produced a large number of plays there in the period of nearly twenty years that elapsed before he opened Covent Garden Theatre. But the *pièce de résistance* was ever his beloved pantomime. He is said to have heartily despised his company of actors ; and they no doubt had a profound contempt for their illiterate but wealthy “governor.” Whatever his contempt was, however, it seldom stood in the way of his judgment. His career of management lasted for nearly fifty years, and in that long time he rarely let an opportunity slip of adding to the brilliant company of artists at his theatre. Reading through the mists of time that have gathered round his name and doings, and making allowances for the roughness of the age, we may come to the conclusion that he was a shrewd business man in spite of some narrow-minded prejudices, and that behind his unpolished manners there beat a kindly heart

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towards those of his fellows less fortunate than himself.

A few pages may here be, not inappropriately, devoted to the origin of the curious medley, so intimately associated with John Rich, and still known as a pantomime ; and I must preface these remarks by an acknowledgment of my particular indebtedness to the valuable and exhaustive notes on the subject generously placed at my disposal by Mr. W. J. Lawrence.

The subject is intensely interesting to any student of the amusements of our forefathers, but it is far too extensive to be dealt with fully here. In a history of Covent Garden Theatre, however, it is peculiarly appropriate that some detailed notice should be taken of the subject, for, beyond all question, it is to the founder of that theatre that succeeding generations owed the many hours of pleasure derived from the pantomimes which, largely in the form that he had given them, remained for nearly a century the favourite amusement of Londoners. Fashions in amusement change almost as rapidly as in dress, and with the refining influences, which began their work in the nineteenth century, the taste for the boisterous and probably indecent fun * of the old pantomime rapidly declined, until the “harlequinade” has finally dwindled to the

* See Appendix.

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few minutes grudgingly admitted by modern pantomime managers at the end of the brilliant spectacular productions their patrons demand.

It is still interesting, however, to the stage antiquarian to see the survival of the ancient Italian types of (*a*) Clown, who replaced Scaramouch, the foil or butt to Arlequin, and an arrant braggart and coward, formerly represented as wearing a mask open on the forehead, cheeks, and chin; (*b*) Pantaloon, or Pantalone, usually representing an old Venetian burgher, who served in his turn as butt to Scaramouch; (*c*) Harlequin, or Arlecchino, who dominated the piece by his wit and general superiority; and (*d*) Columbine, who was originally the village maiden, of somewhat lax morals, daughter to Harlequin and beloved of Scaramouch.

The ancestry of the illustrious four is of more than respectable antiquity, but we shall not here attempt to trace it beyond the year 1673, when, as we gather from an epilogue by John Dryden to his play of the *Silent Woman*, a troupe of Italian artists had appeared in London—

“Th’ Italian merry-andrews took their place,
And quite debauched the stage with lewd grimace;
Instead of wit and humours, your delight
Was there to see two hobby-horses fight;
Stout Scaramoucha with rush lance rode in
And ran a tilt at centaur Arlequin.”

Dryden’s reproaches, levelled at the theatre-

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goers of his day, might almost be described as prophetic of the time then near at hand, when not only his own productions but the plays of

“Shakespear, Rowe, Jonson now are quite undone,”

as was written under one of the caricatures directed against Rich and his all-conquering pantomimes sixty years later.

In 1677, and again in 1686, plays, indicating by their titles the presence of the Harlequin element, were produced in London.

In the latter year one of the earliest versions of the ancient German legend of “Faustus” was evidently burlesqued by the audacious Harlequin, for the title runs, *The Life and Death of Dr. Faustus, with the humours of Harlequin and Scaramouch*.*

Mr. Lawrence adduces a great deal of matter to prove conclusively that Rich did not need to go abroad for his inspiration in constructing pantomimes.† He had his materials ready to hand in the “lewd grimaces” of “stout Scaramouch” and “Centaur Arlequin.”

An essential difference between the school of

* There is little doubt that the story had been burlesqued even before this in the booths of Bartholomew Fair.

† As against this, it may be noted that the very name, Lun, adopted by Rich himself when acting Harlequin was that of a famous French Harlequin acting in Paris at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

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English pantomime, erected if not founded by Rich, and that performed by travelling troupes in the booths and fairs of the Continent was, that while the latter were speaking characters, those of Rich and his predecessor, Weaver,* were dumb.

Indeed, Rich did little more than borrow the names and dresses of the characters, and twist and turn their various attributes to his own purposes.

The costume of Harlequin was radically altered, for in its original form (attributed to a certain Joseph Dominique Biancolelli, *circa* 1657) the trousers were loose, whereas in Rich's time they were tightened. Rich, too, it was, who endowed him with the magical powers exercised by the wooden baton.

In the "Memoirs of Grimaldi" (edited by Charles Dickens when a young man), it is distinctly asserted that previous to 1799 Harlequin had been habited *à la* Watteau; but that in *Harlequin Amulet*, produced at Drury Lane in that year, James Byrne, the ballet-master, changed the dress to a neatly fitting white silk shape, into which the parti-coloured diamonds were deftly woven after receiving a lavish sprinkling of spangles.

Dr. Doran is responsible for the assertion that Rich was the first Harlequin who altered his costume from the loose trousers of the Watteau

* For a reference to Weaver, see p. 12.

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pictures to the tight pantaloons usually worn nowadays. He asserts that Rich "brought in the tight spangled dress long before Byrne's time," to whom the introduction is sometimes assigned.*

That Rich had not to go even outside London to borrow his inspiration is proved by the fact that one of the plays in which he himself frequently performed, viz. *The Cheats of Scapin*; or, *The Tavern Bilkers*, had been arranged for Drury Lane by John Weaver, a Shrewsbury dancing-master, as early as 1702, as "an Entertainment of Dancing, action and motion only."

John Weaver arranged at least three other pantomimes in the same manner for Drury Lane, viz. *Mars and Venus*, *Orpheus and Eurydice* in 1717, and *Cupid and Bacchus* in 1719. Cibber, at that time acting with Wilks and Booth as the joint managers of Drury Lane Theatre, thinks it necessary to apologize for their introduction as the precursors of that "succession of monstrous medlies that have so long infested the stage," and which, he goes on to say, "we generally made use of as crutches to our weakest plays."†

Rich apparently hit upon the idea of utilizing the Italian types as the vehicle for a great deal

* The assertion is certainly borne out by the French print of Rich as Harlequin, reproduced opposite p. 4, which is dated 1753.

† Cibber's "Apology."

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of entertaining foolery, coupled with a use of mechanical stage effects which doubtless rendered the complete "show" a welcome relief to the tedious mythological dramas with which it was usually played in alternate acts or scenes, and whose long-winded declamations gave Fielding the text for his well-known diatribe in "Tom Jones." *

"This entertainment consisted of two parts, which the inventor distinguished by the names of the serious and the comic. The serious exhibits a certain number of heathen gods and goddesses who were certainly the worst and dullest company into which an audience was ever introduced; and (which was a secret known to few) were actually intended so to be in order to contrast the comic part of the entertainment and to display the tricks of Harlequin to the better advantage. This was perhaps no very civil use of such personages, but the contrivance was nevertheless ingenious enough and had its effect. And this will now plainly appear if instead of serious and comic, we supply the words duller and dullest; for the comic was certainly duller than anything before shown on the stage and could be set off only by that superlative degree of dulness which composed the serious.

"So intolerably serious indeed were the gods and heroes that Harlequin (though the English gentleman of that name is not at all related to

* *Vide* chap. i.

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the French family, for he is of a much more serious disposition) was always welcome on the stage as he reliev^d the audience from worse company."

From all of which it may be inferred that Fielding was no friend to Rich and his favourite productions.

As early as 1691, in Dryden's *King Arthur ; or, the British Worthy*, we may trace the *motif* so popular even up to the present-day pantomimes, of supernatural interference with the action of the mortal characters in the play. Nor was the ingenuity of Rich in mechanical devices any novelty in the theatres of the day ; an entertainment produced at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket in 1706, entitled *British Enchanters*, by Lord Lansdowne, contains elaborate directions for some mechanical stage effects. In common with similar productions, it was at that time known as an "Opera," and Rich simply substituted Harlequin for the enchanter type, deprived him of speech, and, while making him the mainspring of every important incident of the plot, gave himself incidentally the opportunity of displaying his own ability in a line of "business"—that of dumb show—in which he well knew that he excelled.

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About the year 1721-2, John Thurmond, a dancer employed at Drury Lane, brought out there another version of the Faustus legend, entitled *Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, into which he introduced a "Masque of all the Deities," in the manner first started by Rich at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Rich thereupon "went one better" on the same subject at his own theatre with great success, and so found his *métier* in the furore created by these rival efforts.

A further reference of great importance to the subject is found in a contemporary note to Pope's "Dunciad," wherein he extols the merits of Rich's collaborateur, Lewis Theobald, who first brought the "shows, machines, and dramatical entertainments" from Bartholomew Fair at Smithfield to the theatres of Covent Garden, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the Haymarket, "to be the reigning pleasures of the Court and Town."

At these entertainments we first find the prototype of the clown who, although he replaced and survived Scaramouch, was not by any means a similar character, but a distinct individual and servant to the Country Squire in love with Columbine, the former of whom later on altogether vanished from the plot. The music for these productions was, it is interesting to know, the distinct forerunner of the most serious

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and recent compositions of Wagner and Strauss, for a contemporary writer tells us that “every action was executed to different agreeable music, so properly adapted that it properly expresses what is going forward.” In later years, whether from a dearth of native talent for composition or not cannot be said, but the practice became prevalent of merely selecting airs of other compositions and using them as appropriately as possible for the piece in hand.

It is curious in summing up the career of John Rich as a producer to read that in all his long thirty years’ experience as a manager at Covent Garden he only found it necessary to have a *répertoire* of about twenty pantomimes, thirteen of which dated from his Lincoln’s Inn Fields days, and which he periodically revived at Covent Garden with a more elaborate setting to supplement the six or seven new pieces his fastidious taste had accepted.

As showing the development of the ancient pantomime plot, the following description by the late J. R. Planché of the typical story as told in the first quarter of the nineteenth century is of interest here, the more so as in its turn it has succumbed to the inexorable process of time :—

“A pretty story—a nursery tale—dramatically told, in which ‘the course of true love

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never did run smooth' formed the opening; the characters being a cross-grained old father, with a pretty daughter who had two suitors, one a poor young fellow, whom she preferred, the other a wealthy fop whose pretensions were of course favoured by the father. There was also a body-servant of some sort in the old man's establishment. At the moment when the young lady is to be forcibly married to the fop she despised, or on the point of eloping with the youth of her choice, the good fairy made her appearance and, changing the refractory pair into Harlequin and Columbine, the old curmudgeon [father] into Pantaloon, and the body-servant into Clown, the two latter in company with the rejected 'lover,' as he was called, commenced the pursuit of the happy pair, and the 'comic business' consisted of a dozen or more cleverly constructed scenes, in which all the tricks and changes had a meaning and were introduced as contrivances to favour the escape of Harlequin and Columbine when too closely followed by their enemies . . . till the inevitable 'dark scene' came—a cavern or forest in which they were overtaken by their enemies and the magic wand of Harlequin snatched from his grasp by the Clown. Again at the critical moment the fairy appeared, and exacting the consent of the father to the marriage of the devoted couple, transported the whole party to what was really a grand last scene [the prototype of the modern transformation scene] which everybody waited for. There was some

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congruity, some dramatic construction in such pantomimes, and the acting of Bologna the Harlequin, a first-rate melodramatic performer, Barnes, the Pantaloon who was unsurpassable in the representation of imbecility, and the great Grimaldi! Only those who saw him as Kasrac the magician's slave in *Aladdin* and other parts can conceive the power he possessed in character parts and depicting the passions."

During the period that John Rich maintained his highly successful management of his own theatre, the apex was set to his success by the production and enormous reception of *The Beggar's Opera*, January 29, 1728, which, to complete the mortification of Cibber and his brother manager at Drury Lane, had previously been refused by them. It is hardly out of place to here refer more particularly to the production of Gay's famous work. Its origin is generally attributed to a remark of Swift, to the effect "that a pretty sort of thing might be made out of a Newgate Pastoral."

"Gay," says Pope, "was inclined to try at such a thing for some time, but afterwards thought it would be best to write a comedy on the same plan." This idea, again, might have been modified and altered by the extraordinary reception Italian opera, then only recently introduced, had met with. Whatever

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the origin of its existence may have been, the success of *The Beggar's Opera* was immediate and undoubted, and Gay netted £600 from its first season, when it had the then wonderful run of sixty-three nights. The receipts during the representations amounted to no less than £11,363 4s., or an average of about £180 a night, an immense sum for that period. It was renewed next season with equal applause, and immediately spread into all the great towns of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and in many places was played thirty, forty, and fifty times successively.

At this time (1728-9) Barton Booth,* one of the bright particular stars of the great rival playhouse of Drury Lane, had begun to set. His last appearance had been as "Julio," in the *Double Falsehood*, and from thenceforward, owing to a painful illness, his life must have been one prolonged misery, although his weary spirit did not finally quit his body until five years later. Another of Drury Lane's attractions, Mrs. Oldfield, was often too ill to act, and in 1729, Congreve and Steele, whose productions had brought so much grist to the mill of the Lane, had died.†

* Barton Booth, the tragedian, resided for many years at Cowley Grove, Middlesex, afterwards the country residence of John Rich, who was buried in Hillingdon church.

† It should, however, be noted that 1730 saw the first appearance of Miss Kitty Rafter, afterwards the celebrated Mrs. Clive.

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Yet evidently the conditions were not so favourable as to induce Rich to bid for a partnership in the Theatre Royal ; he had probably too long known and appreciated the huge advantages reaped by the manager who is independent of others. Of other theatres, there were Goodman's Fields, afterwards the scene of Garrick's *début*, and "the little house in the Haymarket," opposite the King's Theatre, already referred to—all making successful bids for popularity. Dr. Doran speaks of an apparent decline in the fortunes of the British drama at that time, a statement one can hardly reconcile with the fact that it was the moment John Rich thought propitious to issue a prospectus of the proposed new house in Covent Garden.

"There had long been," says Doran, "an expressed desire for a new theatre and new system. In the prospectus it was stated that actors and authors should be excluded from the management, which was to be entrusted to individuals who, at least, knew as little about it, namely, men of quality, taste, figure, and of a fortune varying from ten to twelve hundred pounds. A committee was to be appointed, whose duty it would be, among others, to provide for the efficient reading of new plays, for their being listened to with reverence and attention."

The MS. department of the British Museum

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contains much fragmentary evidence concerning the early history of the great theatre, but nothing is more interesting to the student of Covent Garden in its infancy than the original deed or agreement, dated December, 1731, by which Rich bound himself to build a theatre on a site of which he had obtained a lease from the Duke of Bedford, at a ground rent of £100 per annum, and inviting all and sundry to take shares in his venture to the extent of one-fiftieth part apiece, the price of each fiftieth to be £300, payable in three instalments of £100 each. Rich himself heads the list, and there follow the names of his co-signatories, each of whom undertakes to buy a fiftieth part, on the conditions named as follows :—

PROPOSALS BY JOHN RICH, ESQ^{RE}.

Whereas Mr. Rich has obtained from his Grace the Duke of Bedford a Lease of a peice or parcel of Ground contiguous to Bow Street and Hart Street and Covent Garden containing in length from East to West one hundred and twenty feet and in breadth from North to South one hundred feet for the Terme of Sixty-one years Commencing from Lady Day 1731 at the yearly Rent of one hundred pounds.

Upon which ground there is now Building a new Theatre or play House with other proper Offices and Apartments thereunto belonging

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which Mr. Shepherd the Undertaker of the Said Building hath contracted wth Mr. Rich to finish on or before Michaelmas Day next.

Now Mr. Rich proposes to divide the premisses into fifty parts or Shares and to dispose thereof to such persons as will subscribe to become purchasors of the same upon the Terms and in the manner following viz^t:

That the Subscribers for each Share do upon the signing this proposal pay into the hands of Mr. Hoare Banker in Fleet Street, one hundred pounds, and on Lady Day 1732 the further sume of one hundred pounds, and when the New Theatre shall be finished, the further sume of one hundred pounds.

Which three payments are to be in full for the purchase of each share and the moneys so raised to be applyed from time to time by the said Mr. Hoare and Mr. Christopher Cock (who are Trustees for that purpose) to pay for Materials and Workmanship for the compleating and finishing this Theatre pursuant to the contract with Mr. Shepherd and the Residue (if any) to be paid to Mr. Rich.

That upon payment of the last sume of one hundred pounds by each Subscriber Mr. Rich together with the said Mr. Hoare and Mr. Cock will execute an assignment of one fiftieth part of the premisses for the residue of the said Term of Sixty-one years unto such Subscriber.

And that such subscriber do immediately thereupon make a lease of such share so assigned unto Mr. Rich for so much of the said Term of

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Sixty-one years as shall be then to come Except one Month.

By which Leases there shall be reserved to the Subscriber the Rent of Two Shillings for every Night that publick acting shall be performed in the said New Theatre or in any other Theatre or place where Mr. Rich or those claiming under him shall act plays by virtue of his present or any Subsequent authority from the Crowne.

The said Rent of two shillings a night to be paid by the Treasurer in the first place out of the Receipts of the Theatre.

And Mr. Rich agrees that each subscriber or his assignee of such fiftieth part shall have the liberty to see plays in the New Theatre (without paying anything for the same) in any part of the House excepting behind the Scenes.

And in such Leases Mr. Rich will covenant to pay the ground Rent of one hundred pounds a year and to indemnify the purchasers from the Same.

Witnesse my hand this 11th December 1731.

JNO RICH.

I agree to purchase one fiftieth part upon ye Terms above mentioned, Norfolk, George, Henry Finch, Chr. Cock, ditto for Jno Howard, for Martin Fellows, Rupert Clarke, Henry Talbot, Edwd. S. Shepherd, Mariane Charles, Wm. Genew, Tho. Moðre, Tho. Brand, Cha. Churchill for Jas. Theobald, Ed. S. Shepherd, W. Sander-son, W. Sharpe, Sals. Cader, Geo. Campbell

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Baltimore, Chas. Hale (2/50ths), Henry Collins (2/50ths), E. Boulton, Wm. Workman, Francis Bedwell, R. Knight, Bedford, Chas. Rambouillet, W. Greenwood, Henry Potter, Phil Hubert, Richmond and Leñox, W. Greenwood, Ed. Ravenel, John Paul Yvounet, Samuel Clarke, Rupert Clarke (2/50ths), W. Sanderson, Chandos, C. F. Zincke, Wm. de Grave, Thos. Wood, Jane Wakefield (2/50ths), James Dela Creuze.

Rich gave a public exhibition during the year 1730 of the designs of his architect, James Shepherd, who had been the designer both of the theatre in Goodman's Fields and that built by Rich's father in Portugal Row, Lincoln's Inn Fields.*

What the public thought of the new enterprise may be gauged by the fact that the prospectus was issued in December, 1730, and that by January, 1731,† £6000 was subscribed and the building begun. The site chosen by Rich was not a particularly eligible one, and possibly attracted his attention more by its cheapness than from any other reason, the ground rent paid by him to the Duke of Bedford being only £100 a year. It lay at the north-east corner of the Piazza on Covent Garden, and at

* For information respecting erection of the first Covent Garden Theatre, see *Times*, December 7, 1832, and *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. cii. part 2, pp. 585-590.

† See *Reed's Weekly Journal or British Gazette*, Saturday, January 16, 1731.

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the back of the houses then fronting into Bow Street. It had no frontage worth mentioning in any direction, for the west side abutted on to a narrow passage running into Hart Street from the Piazza, which contained the principal entrance, while Hart Street never was, and is not now, wide enough to be worthy of a fine elevation being erected. The stage entrance was, however, in Bow Street, with probably another in Hart Street, and was approached by a narrow passage running between the houses numbered 3 and 4. It was not until the first great fire in 1808 that these houses were finally pulled down, and the grand entrance constructed where it now stands.

Public interest in the new building was stimulated by repeated announcements in the newspapers. In the *Daily Advertiser* of Thursday, April 29, 1731, we read—

“that a great number of workmen are daily employed in digging the foundations near Covent Garden on which a new playhouse is to be very speedily built for Mr. Rich, the master of the Theatre Royal in Lincoln’s Inn Fields—notwithstanding the various reports to the contrary.”

The same paper on August 6 announces that—

“The new Theatre building near Covent

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Garden for Mr. Rich is carrying on with such expedition and diligence, there being a great number of hands employed therein, that it is thought it will be completely finished and ready to receive his audience next winter. Several persons of distinction resort thither daily to view the said works, and seem much pleased with the performance.”

An unfortunate occurrence, which, added to a lack of funds, delayed the work considerably, took place in the first days of November, 1731.

The newspaper accounts of the day vary somewhat in their descriptions of what actually happened. Thus *Reed's Weekly Journal* for Saturday, November 6, 1731, says—

“Last Tuesday great part of the roof of the new playhouse which is building near Covent Garden fell in, when several of the men that were at work had their limbs broken, and one had his skull fractured, and died in about eight hours after.”

On the other hand, the *Grub Street Journal* minimises the effects of the accident. It states that—

“as the workmen were raising one of the rafters, the tackling breaking, it fell on the main beams and threw down one man, who is since dead, and another was slightly hurt; but no damage

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whatever happened to the roof or any other part of the building."

The net result of the various delays was that Rich found it impossible to get the building finished in time for the autumn opening he had anticipated. Accordingly, he reopened for a brief period at Lincoln's Inn Fields. This he was enabled to do as the possessor of both the Killigrew and Davenant patents, under the latter of which the new theatre was being opened.

It is not difficult to suppose that the formidable new neighbour created some consternation in Drury Lane. This much is certain, the actual opening had been fixed for the previous week, on November 26, and it has even been conjectured that the hostility displayed by his rivals induced Rich to postpone the opening in order to be quite sure that no hitch was likely to occur.

The following lines appeared in a contemporary print, and are instructive, as showing the spiteful feeling created by the pushfulness and success of the energetic Harlequin:—

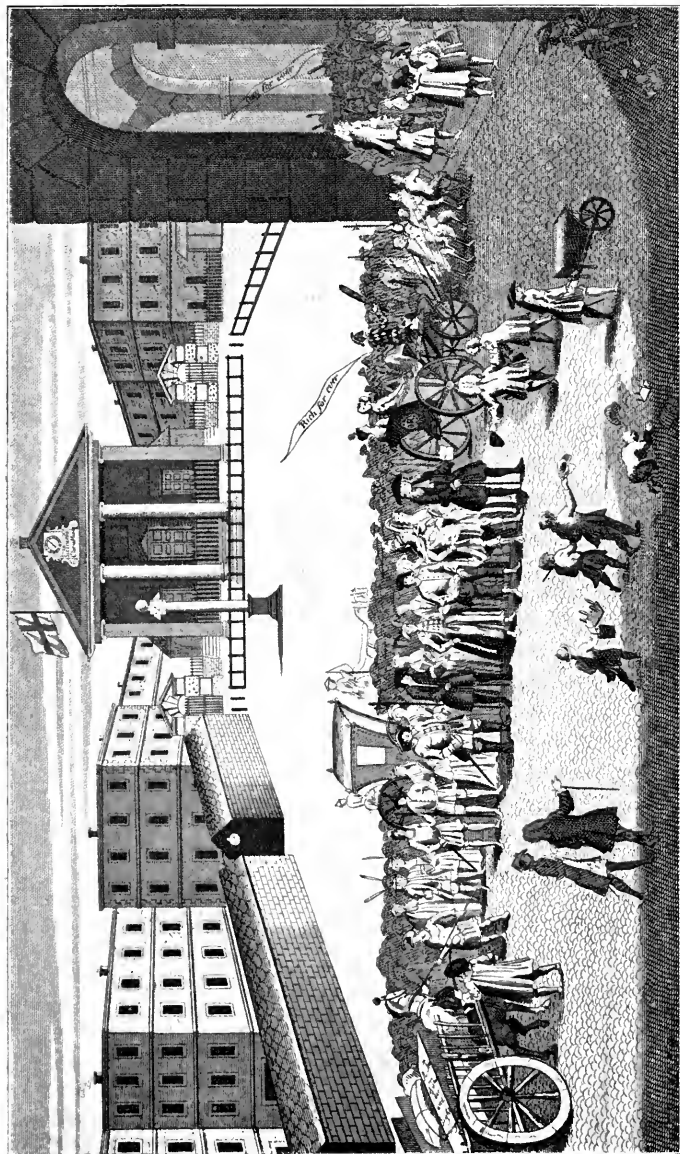
"Thespis the first of the dramatic race
Stroll'd in a cart for gain, from place to place ;
His actors rude, his profits came but slow,
The poet he and master of the show,
To raise attention he employ'd his art
To build another and more costly cart.
New asses he procured to drag the load,
And gain'd the shouts of boys upon the road.
Awhile the gay machine attention drew,
The people throng'd because the sight was new ;

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Thither they hurried once and went no more,
For all his actors they had seen before ;
And what *it* was they wish'd no more to see—
The application, Lun, is left to thee."

The following brief contemporary description of "the Theatres in Covent Garden" refers to both Drury Lane and Covent Garden. It is taken from a curious little book (by Ralph), entitled, "A New Critical Review of the Publick Buildings Statues and Ornaments in and about London and Westminster. The Second Edition Corrected London Printed By C. Ackers in St. Johns Street for J. Wilford behind the Chapter House in St. Pauls Churchyard and Y. Clarke at the Golden Ball in Duck Lane 1736."

"As to the THEATRES there is not room to say much of either, they have no fronts to the street to require grandeur or magnificence and with regard to their insides the old one appears to be best calculated for the convenience of speaker and hearer and the new for splendour and admiration: the extravagant largeness of the first gallery in one is as great an absurdity as the division in the middle of the other. The decorations on the Stage on both, I am of opinion, might be much improved, and great care should be always taken not to decorate the side of the house next the audience so extravagantly as to eclipse the other: keeping is necessary in all things and the first exhibition of beauty should be in so moderate a degree as to



RICCI'S GLORY ; OR, THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO COVENT GARDEN, 1732.

From the Print by Hogarth.

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leave continual room for additions till the eye is entirely satisfied. The figure of a satire over the pit in the house at Covent Garden has an admirable propriety in it and deserves more praise than all the painting besides."

Hogarth's picture (see illustration), "Rich's Glory, or the Triumphant Entry into Covent Garden" (erroneously dated 1728), refers to the removal from the Fields to Covent Garden in 1732. Vandergucht also issued a scenic print of the New Theatre with the distich "Shakspear, Rowe, Johnson now are quite undone," etc. There are not many detailed references extant concerning the original building, but C. Dibdin, in Britton and Pugin's "Illustrations of the Public Buildings of London," speaks of "the longitudinal diameter of the auditory part from the commencement of the stage to the back wall being fifty-four or fifty-five feet." To augment the receipts the custom was to build numerous seats upon the stage, where a very large body of auditors was accommodated. The stage was small, without footlights, and illuminated by four hoops of candles, over which a crown hung from the borders. The orchestra was of a bowed form, and did not run the whole breadth of the house. It held from fifteen to twenty musicians. The boxes were flat in front, and had twisted double branches for

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candles fastened to the plaster. There were pedestals on each side of the boards, with elaborately painted figures of tragedy and comedy thereon.

Regarding the scenery, a paragraph appeared in the *Daily Journal* for Monday, September 16, 1732—

“We hear that Mr. Harvey and Mr. Lambert have been employed some time in painting the scenes for the New Theatre in Covent Garden, and that Sig. Amiconi, who painted the Lord Tankerville’s excellent staircase in St. James Square, is to show his art in the ceiling of that Theatre, and in order thereto has prepared a design in which Apollo is represented in an assembly of the Muses dignifying Shakespear with the laurel; and as the several hands employed require some time further to execute their undertakings . . . it is determined not to act in . . . Covent Garden till the decorations are quite finished.”

At last, however, on December 6, 1732, the theatre opened with a modest revival of Congreve’s *Way of the World*. At the prices charged (5s. to the boxes, 2s. 6d. to the pit, 2s. and 1s. to the gallery, and 10s. 6d. for a seat on the stage) the house was calculated to hold about £200. “To meet the great demand for seats, pit-boxes were laid together at 5s., and to prevent the

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scenes from being crowded, admission on the stage was raised to 10s. 6d." The following is the cast as given in Genest's History:—

Mirabell, Ryan; Waitwell, Pinkethman, Jr.; Fainall, Quin; Millamant, Mrs. Younger; Sir Wilful Witwou'd, Hippisley; Mrs. Marwood, Mrs. Hallam; Witwou'd, Chapman; Foible, Mrs. Stevens; Mrs. Fainall, Mrs. Buchanan.

Davies says of the scenery used at the opening, "The scenes were new and extremely well painted. All the decorations were suited to the grandeur and magnificence of the building."*

In spite of the increased prices, the receipts on the opening night were only £115, instead of the estimated £200. The second piece produced was *The Beggar's Opera*, with Miss Norsa as Polly. It proved successful, and ran for a fair number of nights (Genest says twenty), when it was transferred to Lincoln's Inn Fields, Rich's old house, probably with a new cast. Mr. Genest's record of Rich's own first appearance at Covent Garden is on January 23, 1733, when he played Harlequin in the *Cheats or the Tavern Bilkers* (q.v.). In all, Rich gave about 123 representations during his first season, which ended on June 1, 1733. It was not, apparently, distinguished by any conspicuous successes or failures.

* See "Dramatic Miscellanies," vol. iii. p. 221

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The first new production was Gay's* posthumous opera of *Achilles*,† acted about twenty times. The third night was given as a benefit for the sisters of the deceased author, and produced £153 12s. The only Shakespearian productions mentioned by Genest are *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Mr. Lawrence, in his MS. notes, points out that the season on the whole had been a very successful one. Royalty had honoured the theatre with its presence no less than six times. These command-nights ensured the boxes being filled by the hangers-on to the skirts of the august individual at whose request a special performance was being given. Special notice was taken of these visits by the newspapers, who also remarked upon the enthusiastic manner in which Rich's productions had been received by the general public. The position of the green room in a theatre may seem to be a matter of small importance, but it had something to do with the favour shown to Rich's productions by the Court.

The green room at Drury Lane was in such a position that to reach it from the Royal box necessitated crossing the stage, to which the noblemen and lords-in-waiting objected. That

* John Gay, *b.* 1688 ; *d.* Dec. 4, 1732.

† Produced Feb. 10, 1733.

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at Covent Garden was so placed that access from the box was easy, and this naturally led to a great display of Royal favour towards the newer establishment.

There was a short summer season at the Covent Garden, during which two new pieces were produced, a tragedy called *The Tuscan Treaty* and an opera entitled *The Fancied Queen*.

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CHAPTER II

1733–1737

THE second season opened on September 15, 1733, with *Othello*, and included *Macbeth*, *Henry VIII.*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Richard III.*, *Hamlet*, and *Measure for Measure*; but we may pass over the remainder of the season 1733-4, as but little of importance occurred until we come to the beginning of the winter season of the latter year, which saw an auspicious event* in the history of the theatre. This was the engagement of the house for the performance of oratorios by George Frederick Handel, or, as he was invariably set out in the contemporary advertisements, “Mr. Handell.” Handel was at this time a man of about fifty years of age. He was born, according to his latest biographers, on February 23, 1685.†

* According to Hawkins, Handel had “first produced *Esther* at the Academy of Ancient Music in the month of February, 1731, which was so greatly applauded that in the following year, in the Lent season, he performed it, as also *Deborah*, at Covent Garden.” This is a manifest error. The theatre was not opened until the December of that year.

† The date given on his tomb in Westminster Abbey is known to be erroneous.

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My readers will not complain, I trust, if I digress for a space in order to describe briefly the life of the remarkable man who now enters largely into our history. He had commenced his musical career as “Violon di ripieno” (or supplementary violin) in the opera house at Hamburg in 1703, and so for more than thirty years had been more or less intimately connected with the theatre. Handel had been invited to visit England as early as 1709 by some English noblemen, whom he met at the Court of the Elector of Hanover, George, afterwards the First of England. Here he accordingly arrived at the end of the year 1710. He immediately found employment at the Queen’s Theatre, then under the direction of Aaron Hill, the poet and author, who was for a brief period manager also of Drury Lane Theatre. His first production in England was the opera *Rinaldo*, a libretto by Hill, translated into Italian by Rossi, and set to music by Handel in the space of a fortnight, to the enormous astonishment of his collaborateurs. It is now known to music lovers as having contained the celebrated aria “Lascia che io pianga.”

At the close of the opera season of 1711 Handel returned to Hanover. But in 1712 he again visited London, and this time made up his mind that it was to be the permanent scene of his labours.

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In 1716 Handel's opera *Amadigi*, or *Amadis*, was produced by the new manager of the King's Theatre, James Heidegger, commonly said at the time to be the ugliest man alive. In 1718 he obtained the appointment of chapel master to the Duke of Chandos at Cannons, in succession to Dr. Pepusch, afterwards known as the adapter of the airs used in *The Beggar's Opera*.

Schoelcher, in his "Life of Handel," * prints a curious note in connection with the joint subjects of Rich and Handel. Dr. Rimbault communicated it to him as having been written by Samuel Wesley the organist, for his, Rimbault's, father—

"The late comedian Rich, who was the most celebrated Harlequin of his time, was also the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre during the period when Handel conducted his oratorios at that house. He (Rich) married a person † who became a serious character after having been a very contrary one and who requested Handel to set to music the three hymns, 'Sinners, obey the Gospel Word,' 'O Love Divine,' and 'Rejoice the Lord is King,' which I transcribed in the Fitzwilliam Library, from the autography and published them in consequence."

* P. 51.

† It is impossible to say with any certainty to which of John Rich's three wives this refers, but it is not unlikely that it was Priscilla Stevens, the third Mrs. Rich.

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In 1720 Handel threw himself, says M. Schoelcher, into an enterprise which suited the activity of his mind. This was nothing less than the production on a grand scale of Italian opera in London. The principal members of the nobility, with the King at their head, subscribed £50,000, and Handel undertook the task of collecting Italian singers from abroad. The society was allowed by the King to assume the singularly inappropriate name of the Royal Academy of Music. For this venture Handel composed and (on Thursday, December 15, 1720) produced his opera of *Radamistus*. On August 29 in the same year he directed the first performance at Cannons of his oratorio *Esther*, and there also in the following year *Acis and Galatea* was first performed. In 1721 there had come to a head a violent dissension between the admirers of Handel and the supporters of Bononcini, who was at the time considered to be Handel's only serious rival as a musician. Each of the two was a proud and indeed arrogant man, little likely to show that subservience to the nobility conventional at the period. But of this more will be heard hereafter. On December 9, 1721, *Floridante* appeared; on January 12, 1723, *Otho*, or *Ottone*, which Burney calls the flower of the composer's dramatic works. In this opera Cuzzoni, the famous singer, afterwards so

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intimately associated with Handel's fortunes, made her first appearance in England. 1724 was rendered notable by the appearance of *Tamerlanes*, 1725 by *Rodelinda*, and *Scipio* was produced in 1726, which year also saw the opera of *Alexander* first produced. *Admetus*, produced in 1727, had nineteen consecutive representations, one of the longest runs recorded at that time. The opera of *Siroe*, or *Cyrus*, was produced in 1728, and later in the same year *Ptolemy*. At this time, the early season of 1728, John Rich, as we have seen, was producing the opera which was to confer upon his name such immortality as might be bestowed by the punning association of his author's cognomen with his own. *The Beggar's Opera* * was, as we know, an enormous success, and it completely swamped the classic productions of both Handel and his rival Bononcini. The Royal Academy of Music had been a total failure from a financial point of view, and upon June 1, 1728, the theatre was closed. The speculation, however, had not been a bad one for Handel, for in the following year we find him entering into partnership on his own account with Heidegger at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, and on December 29, 1729, the author-manager and his composer produced

* Which made "Gay Rich and Rich Gay."

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Lothario. This was followed by *Parthenope* on February 24, 1730. Space will not permit a detailed description of Handel's connection with Heidegger, during which, besides operas, his first theatre performances of oratorio were given by Royal Command (in April, 1732). The journalists of the period, in recording the fact of the King's visit to the theatre on this occasion, so little understood the essential difference in the character of the music that they carefully describe *Deborah* as an "Opera, acted at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket with vast applause, the music being composed by the great Mr. Handel." Handel's partnership with Heidegger must have terminated about the middle of June, 1734. In October of that year he restarted on his own account at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, but (says Schoelcher) "not finding the theatre convenient, he took Covent Garden Theatre, which had been lately built." Now, the reason advanced by M. Schoelcher for Handel's removal from Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre to Covent Garden may be partly true, but Sir J. Hawkins puts a somewhat different complexion on his account of the matter.* He says—

"The contest between Handel and the

* Hawkins's "History of the Science and Practice of Music," bk. xx. chap. cxcl.

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nobility was carried on with so much disadvantage to the former that he found himself under the necessity of quitting the Haymarket Theatre . . . and with Strada, Bertoli, and Waltz, a bass singer who had been his cook, went to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here he continued, until, *finding himself unable singly to continue the opposition*, he removed to Covent Garden and entered into some engagements with Rich, the particulars of which are not known, save that in discharge of a debt he had contracted with him in consequence thereof he some years after set to music an English opera entitled *Alceste*,* written by Dr. Smollett, and for which Rich was at great expence in a set of scenes painted by Servandoni;† but it was never performed. . . . After his engagement to Rich, Handel, it is said, performed to almost empty houses, and after a contest which lasted about three years, during which time he was obliged to draw out of the funds almost the whole of what in his prosperous days he had there invested, he gave out; and discovered to the world that in this dreadful conflict he had not only suffered in his fortune but in his health."

It is refreshing to read an extract from the *London Daily Post* of November 4, 1734, for

* Further particulars concerning *Alceste*, or *Alcestis*, will be found on pp. 93 and 120.

† John Nicolas Servandoni [1695—1766], a Florentine architect and painter. Engaged as scene-painter at the Paris theatres 1728-46. Designed the portal of St. Sulpice in Paris. Came to London 1749.

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it shows at least an amiable and enlightened trait in the character of a monarch who had none too many. "His Majesty (George II.) was graciously pleased to subscribe £1000 towards carrying on of the operas this season at Covent Garden." Moreover, the King attended regularly with his court when the theatre was otherwise deserted. In the *Theatrical Register* we find: "November 9, 1734, Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. By his Majesty's command. On Saturday next will be performed *Pastor Fido*,* an opera with several additions intermixed with choruses which will be preceded by a new dramatick entertainment in musick called *Terpsicore*." Genest dismisses the evening with the contemptuous comment, "November 9, an Italian opera — frequently the case this season." A copy of the opera book used at the performance, containing the opera and *Terpsicore* under the name of *Prologo*, is in the British Museum. Schoelcher surmises that the first part of the entertainment had been suggested to Handel by the success previously met with by Mdlle. Sallé,† a famous French danseuse whom Rich had engaged for what we should now call *ballets d'action*.

* Handel had written *Pastor Fido* in 1712, and produced it at the King's Theatre.

† See Pougin's *Le Theatre à l'Exposition Universelle de 1889* p. 44.

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Mdlle. Sallé had, it appears, introduced an important reform in theatrical costume. In 1730 warriors of all kinds, Greek, Roman, or Assyrian, used to appear on the stage in tunics belaced and beribboned, in cuirasses, and in powdered wigs bearing tails a yard long, surmounted by helmets with plumes of prodigious height. It appeared to Mdlle. Sallé, who was a good dancer and a woman of taste in all matters of art, that this thing was absurd; but the reforms she suggested were looked upon as ridiculous innovations. In the ballet of *Pygmalion*, Mdlle. Sallé carried out her new principle by appearing not in a Louis XV. dress, but in drapery imitated as closely as possible from the statues of antiquity. There is some little obscurity regarding the date of her first appearance at Covent Garden Theatre. Mr. Edwards, in his “History of the Opera,” fixes it upon Monday, March 11, from the following announcement which appeared in the newspapers:—

“At the THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN. On Monday, March 11 [1734], will be performed a Comedy called “*The Way of the World*,” by the late Mr. Congreve, with entertainments of dancing . . . ‘The French Sailor and his Lass,’ by Mdlle. Salle and Mr. Malter . . . with a new dance called ‘Pigmalion,’ performed by Mr. Malter and Mdlle. Salle, M. Dupré, Mr.

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Pelling, Mr. Duke, Mr. Le Sac, Mr. Newhouse, and M. de la Garde.” *

The London correspondent of the *Mercure de France*, however, writing under the date of March 16, 1734, distinctly states that it “had then been represented for nearly two months, and the public is never tired of it.” The description is worth quoting in full—

“The subject is developed in the following manner. Pygmalion comes into his studio with his pupils, who perform a characteristic dance, chisel and mallet in hand. Pygmalion tells them to draw aside a curtain at the back of the studio, which is adorned with statues. The one in the middle attracts the special admiration of every one. Pygmalion gazes at it and sighs, and by every token shows he is passionately in love with it. He then throws himself at the feet of the statue of Venus, and prays to the goddess to animate his beloved figure. She answers his prayers, and the marble beauty emerges by degrees from her state of insensibility. She evinces her astonishment at her new existence, and the delighted Pygmalion extends his hand to her; she feels, so to speak, the ground with her feet, and takes some timid steps. Pygmalion dances before her as if to instruct her. She repeats her master’s steps from the easiest to the most difficult. You can

* Not referred to by Genest.

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understand what all the passages of this action become executed and danced with the fine and delicate grace of Mdlle. Sallé. She ventures to appear without basket, without a dress, in her natural hair, and with no ornament on her head. She wore nothing in addition to her boddice and under petticoat but a simple robe of muslin, arranged in drapery after the model of a Greek statue. You cannot doubt, sir, of the success this ingenious ballet, so well executed, obtained. At the request of the King, the Queen, the Royal Family, and all the Court, it will be performed on the occasion of Mdlle. Sallé's benefit, for which all the boxes and places in the theatre and amphitheatre have been taken for a month past. The benefit takes place on the first of April.

“Do not expect that I can describe to you Ariadne like Pygmalion ; its beauties are more noble and difficult to relate ; the expressions and sentiments are those of the profoundest grief, despair, and utter dejection ; in a word, all the great passions perfectly declaimed by means of dances, attitudes, and gestures suggested by the position of a woman who is abandoned by the man she loves. . . . The English, who preserve so tender a recollection of their famous Oldfield, whom they had just laid in Westminster Abbey among the great statesmen, look upon her as resuscitated in Mdlle. Sallé when she represents Ariadne.”

Mr. Edwards is at considerable pains to show that the danseuse was not engaged by Handel,

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a view which is not shared by Schoelcher, Handel's biographer. It is probable that she owed her first engagement at Covent Garden in the early part of 1734 to Rich; but, as we have seen, on November 9, 1734, Handel opened at Covent Garden with *Pastor Fido* and *Terpsicore*, in which M. Schoelcher infers Mdlle. Sallé appeared, as she certainly did, in *Ariadne* during the following month of December, and in *Ariodante* on January 8, 1735. Mdlle. Sallé's dancing was evidently of a kind to excite the utmost enthusiasm, and Handel, being an enterprising man, took advantage of the popular *furore* to write *Terpsicore*. This is described by Mr. Lacy as a framework for expressing "the various passions of love." Schoelcher describes the little ballet as an "intermède," or the equivalent to the English masque. After *Pastor Fido* and *The Characters of Love*, with Mdlle. Sallé's feet as the popular draw, *Ariadne* was put on at intervals until the 18th, being interspersed with the nights on which Rich's company held the theatre with comedy and tragedy and the never-failing pantomime. On December 18 Handel produced *Orestes*, described by Schoelcher as "a pure pasticcio." Afterwards, on January 8, 1735, *Ariodante* was put on again, with Mdlle. Sallé as a principal attraction, and had a run of twelve nights. It

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was evident that Rich's arrangements with Handel at this time permitted his making use of portions that he considered attractive of Handel's works in conjunction with his own productions, as we learn from the evening bill of April 17, 1735, when extracts from both *Orestes* and *Pastor Fido* were added to *Henry IV*.

To quit Handel and his fortunes for a moment, the year 1735 was also the birth-year of the remarkable coterie of individuals celebrated during more than a century and a quarter as "The Sublime Society of Beefsteaks," and intimately connected during more than half its existence, a period of over seventy years, with Covent Garden Theatre. The few authentic particulars appended are taken from a brief account of the society, published in 1871, written by an ex-member, Brother Walter Arnold—

"The society was founded by Rich, the celebrated Harlequin and machinist, of Covent Garden Theatre, in 1735. Rich was a man of rare wit and invention. In his room at Covent Garden many of the eminent men of the time connected with literature, fashion, and the drama used to assemble to chat with Rich and his scene-painter, George Lambert.* There from time to time

* George Lambert (*d.* 1765), a landscape-painter in the style of Gaspard Poussin, was employed by the East India Company in decorating their buildings in Leadenhall Street, and on other important buildings.

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they partook, at two o'clock, of the hot steak dressed by Rich himself, accompanied by a bottle of old port from the tavern hard by. Thus the nucleus of a brotherhood was formed, which, it is believed, outlived in point of time any other convivial gathering. It consisted of twenty-four members, and among the members in the eighteenth century there occur the names of many eminent and illustrious men, including Churchill, Dennis Delane, Hogarth, Hippisley, Dr. Anthony Askew, John Beard, Wilkes, Samuel Johnson, Kemble, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and an endless list of well-known noblemen.

“Its connection with Covent Garden Theatre terminated in 1808, after the disastrous fire, when it migrated to the old Lyceum, whence it was once more evicted by fire, and finally came to an end in 1867, after 132 years of existence.”

One of Rich's early successes, dating from his Lincoln's Inn Fields days, *The Rape of Proserpine*, which had been produced there on January 16, 1727, was revived this season as an after-piece on several occasions. It was in the bill with *The Orphan* on November 8, with *Rule a Wife and have a Wife* on November 17, and again after *Venice Preserved* on the 22nd.

It is to the *Rape of Proserpine* pantomime

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that Pope's famous lines in the *Dunciad* apply more particularly—

“ Yet would'st thou more? in yonder cloud behold,
Whose sars'net skirts are edg'd with flaming gold,
A matchless youth ! his nod these worlds controls,
Wings the red lightning, and the thunder rolls,
Angel of Dulness sent to scatter round
Her magic charms o'er all unclassic ground.
Yon stars, yon suns, he rears at pleasure higher,
Illumes their light and sets their flames on fire.
Immortal Rich ! how calm he sits at ease,
Mid snows of paper and fierce hail of pease,
And, proud his mistress' orders to perform,
Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.”

Notwithstanding Pope's satirical reference to Rich in this poem, we have evidence that he was not personally unfriendly to the manager in the following letter addressed to Dodsley,* and printed by the latter in an edition of his play *The Toyshop*, produced at Covent Garden in the 1734–5 season †:—

“ SIR,

“ I was very willing to read your piece, and do freely tell you I like it as far as my particular judgment goes. Whether it has action enough to please on the stage, I doubt. But the morality and satire ought to be relished by the reader. I will do more than you ask me :

* Robert Dodsley, miscellaneous writer and dramatist, 1703–64.

† On February 3, 1735, with following cast : Master of the Toyshop, Chapman ; 1st Gentleman, Bridgwater ; 2nd Old Man, Hippisley ; 1st Lady, Mrs. Bullock ; other parts by Hallam, Hale, Neale, Miss Norsa, and Miss Binks.

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I will recommend it to Mr. Rich. If he can join it to any play with suitable Representations to make it an Entertainment, I believe he will give you a Benefit night, and I sincerely wish it may be turned any Way to your Advantage, or that I could show you my Friendship in any Instance.

“ I am, etc.,

“ A. POPE.”

Dodsley comments on this—

“ He was as good as his word, he recommended it to Mr. Rich, by his Interest it was brought upon the Stage and by the Indulgence of the Town it was very favourably received.”

In December, 1735, the astute Mr. Rich, ever on the alert to consolidate his interests wherever possible, concluded an agreement with Fleetwood of Drury Lane, of which the following is a copy:—

“ *Memorandum.*—It is agreed on between Charles Fleetwood and John Rich Esq^{rs} that they agree to divide all moneys at each play-house (viz. the Theatre Royall in Convent * Garden) above fifty pounds share and share like for the remainder part of this season, and to pay to each other so much money as shall be wanting to make up fifty pounds each night, and to meet once a week to Ballance accounts.

* Covent Garden was formerly so called, but it is curious to find a survival of the ancient name so late as 1735. It arose from the fact that the site formed part of a nunnery attached to the Abbey of Westminster.

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Dec. ye 18 1735 beg^{ing} on Saturday the 13th.

<p>“ N.B. doo agree if any difference should arise relating to the above agreement to be deter- mined by W. Greenwood Esq.</p>	}	<p>CHAS. FLEETWOOD. JOHN RICH.</p>
--	---	--

“ Witness WALTER GREENWOOD.

“ JOHN ELLYS.” *

There are manuscript volumes of accounts in British Museum, of which the earliest appears to begin Friday, September 12, 1735,† with the performance of *Hamlet*, thus—

	£	s.	d.			£	s.	d.
Rec ^t	55	19	0	Musick ...	...	3	11	10
				Candles ...	...	3	0	0
				Guards ...	...	14	0	
				Casons Bill	...	2	6	8
				Kettle-drums				
				and trumpets		15	0	
				Side drum	...	2	0	
				Barber ...	...	5	4	
				Mr. Powell	...	1	4	0
				(1) Mr. J. Rich—				
				1 day's sal.	...	3	6	8
				(1) In part of				
				arrears of rent		1	0	0
				3 advertis ^{ts} for				
				Hamlet	...	10	6	
Rec ^d the above balance of £39 three						16	16	0
shillings 17 Sept. 1735						39	3	0
For Mr. John Rich						55	19	0
RICH ^d FORD.								

* See facsimile reproduction in C. J. Smith's "Historical and Literary Curiosities" (London, H. G. Bohn, 1852).

† Not in Genest.

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But few notable plays were acted on Rich's nights during Handel's first season, and it is impossible to conjecture whether they met with any greater success than Handel's more lofty productions. Certain it is that, with the exception of a half-dozen Shakespearian performances, no plays then acted have survived to this day, or were probably worthy to survive. Of Handel's productions, no less than fourteen performances of oratorio were given, besides a fair run of the operas *Ariodante* and *Alcina*. In the second of these two operas Handel had written the air "Verdi prati" especially to show off the beauty of Carestini's * voice. The latter, however, did not like it, and positively refused to sing it. This roused the master's temper, and he exclaimed, "You tog! Don't I know petter as yourself vaat es good for you to sing? If you vill not sing all the songs vaat I give you I vill not pay you ein stiver."† This reasoning brought Carestini to his senses, and that very song proved one of his greatest successes, for he never sang it without the warmest applause, and it was invariably encored. In this and the other operas produced by Handel, Signora Strada, who, under Handel's tuition, had become a magnificent singer, was the *prima donna*, and she equally distinguished herself in the oratorios,

* Burney's History. † Giovanni Carestini [1705—circa 1760].

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It must be remembered that, even at this early stage of Handel's connection with Covent Garden Theatre, he was fighting a formidable coalition at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, the scene of his own former partnership with James Heidegger.

We have before briefly referred to the antipathy which was entertained for Handel by a certain highly influential section of the nobility as far back as 1720-1. This had continued to manifest itself with more or less bitterness at intervals ever since. The King's Theatre was at this time under the management of Nicola Porpora, a German musician who had had a varied career in Poland, Germany, and Italy, and had won renown as a singer and teacher, but who is now chiefly remembered in connection with his illustrious rival at Covent Garden. He had produced a masterpiece by Hasse as early as October, 1734, and this was enjoying a prolonged run and producing a corresponding depletion in the treasury at Covent Garden. The success was in a great measure due to the engagement of Farinelli, a famous singer of the time who proved an extraordinary draw.

Handel also had a brilliant company of singers, including for a time Carestini (the rival to Farinelli), Signora Strada, Miss Cecilia Young

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(who became the wife of Dr. Arne in 1736), Erard, a basso, and last, but not least, John Beard,* the English tenor, destined in the fulness of time to not only succeed Rich in the management of his great undertaking, but to become his son-in-law. Unluckily, a previous engagement soon deprived Handel of the services of his star artist Carestini, and so for a time he abandoned the production of Italian opera, and resolved to attempt a new oratorio. This he found in the subject of Dryden's poem of *Alexander's Feast*, which he composed in three weeks, and produced at Covent Garden on February 19, 1736. It met with a splendid reception, if the following extract from the *London Daily Post* may be believed :—

“There never was upon the like occasion so numerous and splendid an audience at any Theatre in London, there being at least 1300 persons present, and it is judged that the receipts of the house could not amount to less than £450. It met with general applause, though attended with the inconvenience of having the performers placed at too great a distance from the audience, which we hear will be rectified the next time of performance.”

However great the success, it was utterly

* The “*Biographica Dramatica*” says Beard made his first appearance this year in *The Royal Chace*, a piece introduced into the pantomime of *Jupiter and Europa* in 1736 at Covent Garden.

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insufficient to redeem the heavy losses on the operas, and there can be little doubt that in theatrical management Handel allowed his enthusiasm to outrun his judgment. However, he certainly showed courage, for in the spring of 1736 he again set about making a great effort to restart Italian opera. The following advertisement from a newspaper of April 13, 1736, showed that even Handel was not above resorting to the modern device of the "puff preliminary." "We hear that Signor Conti, who is regarded as the best singer in Italy, and whom Mr. Handel is bringing over, is expected in a few days." He (Conti) made his *début* at Covent Garden on May 12 in *Atalanta*, which was performed in honour of the occasion of the marriage of Frederick, Prince of Wales, to a Princess of the house of Saxe Gotha.

The following account of the performance is taken from the *Daily Post* of May 13, 1736 :—

"Last night (Wednesday, May 12, 1736) was performed at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden for the first time the opera of *Atalanta*, composed by Mr. Handel on the joyous occasion of the nuptials of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales. In which was a new set of scenes painted in honour to this happy union, which took up the full length of the stage. The forepart of the Scene represented an Avenue

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to the temple of Hymen, adorned with figures of several heathen Deities ; next was a triumphal Arch on the top of which were the Arms of their Royal Highnesses, over which was placed a Princely Coronet. The names Frederica and Augustus appeared above in transparent Characters. Thro' the Arch was seen a pediment supported by four columns, on which stood two cupids embracing and supporting the Feathers in a Princely Coronet the Royal Ensign of the Prince of Wales. In the farther end was a view of Hymens Temple, and the Wings were adorned by the Loves and Graces bearing Hymeneal Torches and putting Fire to Incense in Urns to be offered up upon this Joyful Union.

“The Opera concluded with a Grand Chorus, during which several beautiful Illuminations were displayed which gave uncommon delight and Satisfaction.

“There were present their Majesties, the Duke and the four Princesses, accompanied with a very splendid audience, and the whole was received with unusual acclamations.”

Atalanta evidently met with a fair measure of success, for it appeared again on the following Saturday, May 15, on May 19, 22, and 29 ; and on June 8 the season came to an end, the last week being apparently devoted to plays.

The following curious document is printed by Mr. William Henry Husk in an interesting little book entitled “Celebrations of St. Cecilia’s

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Day.”* He does not state where the original is obtained from, but it bears every appearance of authenticity:—

“A list of the charges made by Handel from the Account of the Treasurer of Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Covent Garden Theatres:—

MR. HANDEL’S MUSIC.

Dr.	Charge.	£	s.	d.	Nights Paid for.	Cr.
1735-6						£ s. d.
Thurs. Feb. 19	<i>Alexander’s Feast</i>	52	5	8	Recd. for Rent & Actors	90 0 0
Wed. „ 25	„ „	52	5	8	Feb. 27 Servants per list	14 11 4
Wed. Mar. 3	„ „	52	5	8	Mar. 3 Received in full	52 5 8
Fri. „ 12	„ „	19	5	8	„ 12 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. „ 17	„ „	19	5	8	„ 17 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. „ 24	<i>Acis and Galatea</i>	19	5	8	„ 24 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. „ 31	„ „	19	5	8	„ 31 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. April 7	<i>Esther</i>	19	5	8	April 7 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. „ 14	„ „	19	5	8	„ 14 „ „	19 5 8
Wed. May 5	<i>Ariodante</i>	52	5	8	May 5 „ „	52 5 8
Fri. „ 7	„ „	52	5	8	„ 7 „ „	52 5 8
Wed. „ 12	<i>Atalanta</i>	52	5	8	„ 12 „ „	52 5 8
Sat. „ 15	„ „	52	5	8	„ 15 „ „	52 5 8
Wed. „ 19	„ „	52	5	8	„ 19 „ „	52 5 8
Sat. „ 22	„ „	52	5	8	„ 22 „ „	52 5 8
Wed. „ 26	„ „	52	5	8	„ 26 „ „	52 5 8
Sat. „ 29	„ „	52	5	8	„ 29 „ „	52 5 8
Wed. June 2	„ „	52	5	8	June 2 „ „	52 5 8
Wed. „ 9	„ „	33	13	8	„ 9 „ „	33 13 8

The charges in this account may be thus explained—

	£	s.	d.
The rent of the theatre per night amounting to ...	12	0	0
The charges for servants, <i>i.e.</i> doorkeepers, etc. ...	7	5	8
	<hr/>		
	19	5	8
To which was added the amount of the nightly salaries the actors were entitled to receive from the Manager on every night on which the Theatre was open during the season and on which dramatic performances could have been given			
	33	0	0
	<hr/>		
Making a total of ...	52	5	8

* London, Bell & Daldy, 186, Fleet Street. 1857.

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The reduction of the charge to £19 5s. 8*d.* for each of the six nights commencing March 12 and ending April 14 is owing to those nights being the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, when (as the theatre could not be opened for dramatic performances) the actors were not entitled to be paid their salaries. It is possible that the reduction of the charge of £33 to £14 8s. on June 9 was owing to the performance being held at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, where the number of actors employed would be smaller.

It must not be omitted from our record of this memorable season that on March 27 Rich added Handel's music to his evening bill, which, as we have seen, was his custom when he considered it sufficiently attractive. On this occasion it was the famous "Water Music."

The story of the origin of this well-known collection of twenty-five concerted pieces is worth brief repetition.

Handel had offended his Royal master, George I., when still Elector of Brunswick, by absenting himself from Hanover. Upon George ascending the throne of Great Britain, Handel was anxious to regain the Royal favour, and through the good offices of a mutual friend of his and the King's, Baron Kilmanseck, he learnt that the King intended to picnic upon the river

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Thames. Accordingly Handel wrote the "Water Music," and caused it to be executed in a barge which followed the Royal boat. The following instruments formed the orchestra upon the occasion: 4 violins, 1 viol, 1 violoncello, 1 counter-bass, 2 hautboys, 2 bassoons, 2 French horns, 2 flageolets, 1 flute, and 1 trumpet. King George at once recognized the style of his old friend and servant, and was so much softened that he eventually took him back into favour.

Two curious advertisements taken from the public journals during this season are worth record at this point. On February 23, for the performance of *Theodosius*, it was announced that "Servants will be allowed to keep places on the stage, and the ladies are desired to send them by 3 o'clock." So the modern fashion of employing district messenger boys to keep places at the *queue* at the pit door had its origin in the days of hoops and ruffles, and once more we find that there is nothing new under the sun.

The other quotation is quite as suggestive of modernity in its attempts to entrap the unwary: "Tickets sold at the door by orange-women and others will not be admitted."

Among instrumentalists and musicians of more or less merit flourishing at this time are the names of Dubourg, Clegg, Festing, Kytch,

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oboist; Boston, a flautist; Karba, a bassoonist; Valentine Snow, an able trumpeter; and of performers on the organ, Roseingrave, Greene, Robinson, Magnus, James, and Stanley; while Pepusch, Galliard, Lampe, John Christian Smith, De Fesche, and Arne, senior, were prominent candidates for musical fame as composers. The mention of Thomas Augustine Arne, who was the musical genius of Drury Lane, brings us to the name of his sister, the celebrated Mrs. Cibber,* who was there displaying her great powers of attraction in both comedy and tragedy. This lady was the wife of the disgraceful blackguard, Theophilus Cibber, and the daughter of “a respectable upholsterer” in Covent Garden. She had so sweet a voice and so much musical talent that Handel specially arranged the contralto songs in *The Messiah* for her. She had been trained as an actress by old Colley Cibber, her father-in-law, and made her first appearance as Zara at Drury Lane in 1736. Last, but not least, must stress be laid on the name of John Beard (*q. v.*), whose fine voice gave popularity to *The Royal Chace* at Covent Garden, and who, as we know, was engaged by Handel for all his oratorios, and of whom we shall hear more hereafter. Hawkins informs us that on the opening of the theatre

* Susanna Maria Arne [1714—1766], married Theophilus Cibber 1734.

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Rich employed John Frederick Lampe, who had been engaged in the band at the King's Theatre, to compose the music to his pantomimes and other entertainments. It must be explained that on the nights Handel occupied the theatre with his operas, Rich, in order to ensure a profit for himself on the salaries he had to pay his actors every night Covent Garden was open, took them to Lincoln's Inn Fields and played there.

We now approach the final and disastrous ending to the unfortunate so-called *partnership* * of Handel with John Rich during the season at the end of the year 1736 and the beginning of 1737.

Rich opened the theatre, according to Genest, on September 15, with *Theodosius* and his

* I cannot think that this is a correct term to use. It was more probably an undertaking on Handel's part to rent the theatre for a certain number of performances, the semblance of partnership being added by Rich taking part payment in profits if any were to accrue. Hoping that some light might be thrown on to the subject by the British Museum records, the writer went carefully through those of the MS. account books now existing there dealing with the Handel years. The entries relating to the oratorios are, however, too obscure to be easily interpreted. The earliest deals with the year 1748, during which it appears that Handel paid £210 rent for the use of the theatre during ten oratorios. Opposite this entry there is a sort of contra item, thus: "Paid rent for Mr. Handell's 10 oratorios £111 2s. 8d." It is evident that the theatre at this time was administered by a treasurer on behalf of a third person or persons, and presumably the latter were only entitled to a certain proportion of the rents and moneys received either from Rich, Handel, or whomsoever became the temporary tenant.

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usual *répertoire* of plays now forgotten, but the season was distinguished by a few Shakespearian productions, notably *King John*, with an actor of note, Walker by name, in the *rôle* of Faulconbridge. Genest attributes the revival to Rich taking a hint from newspaper criticism and approval of the original play, as opposed to an adaptation by Cibber put in rehearsal at Drury Lane and withdrawn. It had a run of about ten nights. *Atalanta* was revived on November 26, 1736, in honour of the anniversary of the Princess's birthday, and "several fine devices of fireworks proper to the occasion were exhibited." On January 12, 1737, *Arminius* appeared, and failed after five performances. On February 16 he produced *Justin*, or *Giustino*, an Italian opera, which also failed after five representations. Schoelcher tells us that in *Justin* there was "no lack of bears, fantastic animals, and dragons vomiting fire." All this was ridiculed by Henry Carey in *The Dragon of Wantley*, a burlesque opera set to music by Lampe, and produced by Rich himself during the autumn season of the same year, viz. on October 26, 1737. The author, in his dedication to Lampe, says—

"Many joyous hours have we shared during the composition of this opera, chopping and changing, lopping, eking out and coining of words, syllables, and jingle to display in English

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the beauty of nonsense, so prevailing in the Italian operas: this pleasure has been since transmitted to the gay, the good-natured, and jocular part of mankind who have tasted the joke and enjoyed the laugh."

The talented author of the *Dragon* was popularly reputed to be the natural son of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. He had previous to this become known to playgoers by many clever and successful plays, for which he had either written words or music, or both.

His name is, of course, likely to be for ever famous as the composer of the delightful ballad, "Sally in our Alley."

His posthumous son, George Savile Carey, was in his turn the grandfather of Edmund Kean. We shall meet with several references to this talented family in the course of our work (see November 17, 1743).

In the beginning of 1737 a plan of Handel's of Lenten representations on Wednesdays and Fridays was thwarted by the Lord Chamberlain's prohibition. He had to make fresh arrangements, and consequently inspired the following announcement in the *London Daily Post* of March 11 :—

"Mr. Handel is preparing Dryden's ode of *Alexander's Feast*,* the oratorios of *Esther*

* First produced February 19, 1736. See *ante*, p. 53.

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and *Deborah*, with several new concertos for the organ and other instruments: also an entertainment of music called *Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verita*, which performances will be brought on the stage and varied every week."

This last was an Italian oratorio dating as far back as 1708.

However, nothing succeeded in attracting the public, and on April 13 he gave *Dido*, and finally, on May 18, *Berenice*, which, says Burney, "in spite of its excellence, could not go beyond four representations."

Mr. Schoelcher tells us that Handel "was present in person at all these successive defeats, for he presided every evening over the organ or the harpsichord. The fall of *Berenice* was the death-blow. He had exhausted all his resources; he had spent the last penny of the £10,000 he had possessed; he had contracted debts; he could go no further; he was obliged to confess himself vanquished—to close his season, and (what was more grievous to so honest a man) to suspend his payments." It is at least dramatically satisfactory to record that the rivals, who were mainly responsible for this fight to the death, sustained such losses in the struggle that they also had to quit the field.*

* "When, after the expiration of his [first] contract with Heidegger at the 'King's Theatre,' he removed to Covent Garden,

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Handel's disastrous failure was at least the means of showing him the confidence his sturdy integrity had inspired. His artists willingly accepted his bills, which were duly honoured in good time, and so ended, sadly enough, the first connection of Covent Garden Theatre with that great genius whose extraordinary achievements, although they were doubtless enjoyed and wondered at by their contemporary admirers, become, like great mountains, more titanic and superb as the age in which they appeared recedes farther from us. He will not again enter into our chronicles until February, 1743, a period of nearly six years.

in 1735, still carrying on the war against Porpora [manager of the Lincoln's Inn Theatre], who removed at the same time to the 'King's Theatre,' George II. subscribed £1000 towards the expenses of Handel's management; and it was the support of the King and the Royal Family that enabled him to combat the influence that was brought to bear against him by the aristocracy. Handel, according to Arbuthnot, owed his failure in a great measure, the first time, to *The Beggar's Opera*. The second time, on the other hand, it was the *nobility's* opera that ruined him. Handel now had only Carestini to depend upon. Porpora, his rival, had secured two established favourites, Cuzzoni and Senesino [both members of Handel's old company at the Academy], and had, moreover, engaged Farinelli, by far the greatest singer of the epoch. Nevertheless, Porpora failed almost at the same time as Handel, and at the end of the year 1737 there was no Italian Opera at all in London."—Edward's "History of the Opera," p. 167.



GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL.

From the Painting by T. Hudson, engraved by W. Bromley.

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CHAPTER III

1737-1745

THE chronicles of the next few years have no such heroic struggles to record as those of George Frederic Handel.

The autumn season of 1737 is notable only for the first appearance of the *Dragon of Wantley*, by Lampe and Carey, on October 26, of which we heard in the last chapter. On November 21 the theatres were all closed until the new year, on account of the death of Queen Caroline.

In January, 1738, Sir Hildebrand Jacob's *Nest of Plays* made its unfortunate appearance, and was immediately damned. It was the first play produced under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain, who, by the passing of a new Act of Parliament, was constituted the licensing official for the production of any stage plays. This, in the opinion of some of the playgoers of the day, was a fine opportunity to show the newly born authority that they only were the ultimate tribunal who should decide upon

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the rights of a play to be heard. Accordingly, most of the early productions under the new act were, by a sort of vicarious vengeance, mercilessly condemned.

The beginning of 1738 was, however, also rendered memorable by a series of remarkable Shakespearian revivals, started in February with *King John* and *Richard II.* The latter is said by Genest not to have been acted for forty years, and the revival was evidently characterized by considerable expense and distinction. In the scene representing the lists at Coventry, Bolingbroke and Norfolk were dressed in complete armour, and the King was seated on a throne of State. The part of the King was taken by Delane, who is said to have rendered justice to it. Rich had spared no expense in presenting an elaborate combat scene. He had also engaged a son-in-law of Aaron Hill—"Tall Johnson," as he was nicknamed, being nearly seven feet in height—to play John of Gaunt. Ryan acted Bolingbroke, Walker was the Mowbray, and Stephens the Duke of York. Chapman was the Bishop of Carlisle, a part for which he was, it appears, notoriously unfitted. The other blot upon the cast was the entrusting the part of Abbot of Westminster to be represented by the curious personality of Michael Stoppelaar. This gentleman's raucous voice and uncouth antics sent the

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house into fits of laughter, that must have entirely spoilt the effect of the scenes in which he appeared. He was an Irishman of some versatility, being, in fact, an artist of ability and a man of good education. He was noted for a tendency to blurt out those home-truths which are better left unsaid, one of which, related by Davies, occurred in connection with this very revival. Rich had engaged for the part of Aumerle an actor named Hallam, who, though a performer of no ability, had managed to hood-wink Rich into giving him an agreement for seven years. The manager soon found out his mistake, and was grumbling about it to Michael Stoppelaar, who, as usual, spoke his mind without thinking of the consequences. "Upon my soul, sir," he said, "he got on the blind side of you there!" Rich, considerably nettled, walked away, and the others present made Stoppelaar aware of his indiscretion, telling him that the method of its committal was rendered even worse by the fact of Rich being afflicted with a cast in his eye. "I never heard of it," said poor Stoppelaar; "I'll go immediately and ask his pardon."

Yates, afterwards a well-known actor, was at this time a young man, and had more than one small part this season.

Genest relates an amusing story of an actor

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named Clarke, who took part in the revival. He was useful as an understudy to Rich's Harlequin parts, and, indeed, was so like the original that one night Rich paid dearly for the resemblance. Another actor had quarrelled with Clarke and waited for an opportunity to show his resentment. Unluckily, Rich happened to be in the way of the angry person as he came off the stage, and received such a blow of the fist in the stomach as for some time deprived him of the power to breathe. On perceiving his mistake, we are told, the actor implored the manager's pardon, explaining that he thought he had struck Nat Clarke. "And pray," mildly said Mr. Rich, "what terrible provocation could Clarke give to merit such a violent blow?" If the story has any truth in it, we may agree that such a gentle reproof was less than the occasion deserved.

On February 16, 1738, "at the desire of the Ladies of Quality," *Henry IV.*, Part 2, was revived after an interval of fifty years; on the 23rd, *Henry V.*, "not acted," as Genest says, "for forty years"; and on March 13, again by desire of the "Ladies of Quality," the indefatigable manager produced *Henry VI.*, Part 1, not a bad record for one month. Of this last revival, Genest observes that it had perhaps not been acted since the time of Shakespear.

In August a new play, *Marina*, adapted from

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Pericles (an almost impossible play to produce nowadays), came out ; and on August 30, the "Summer Company's" bills end.

A famous old actor took his last benefit on January 6, 1739. William Bullock was then, if we may credit his own statement, over seventy-two years of age, and had been before the footlights since 1696, when he was the original representative of Sly in *Love's Last Shift*. Gildon and Davies both bestow high praise upon him as "an actor of great glee and much comic vivacity."

At this his last benefit he played Dominic in the *Spanish Fryar*, and with much quaint simplicity thus addressed his patrons beforehand—

"Mr. Bullock hopes his great age, upwards of three score and twelve, will plead his excuse that he cannot pay his duty to his acquaintance and friends, whose good nature may engage them to assist him in this decline of life, in order to make the remainder of his days easy and comfortable to him. In his younger years he had the pleasure and happiness of entertaining the town, and Sir Richard Steele, in his *Tatler*, has been pleased to perpetuate his memory in honouring him with a memorial there. As this is the last time he may possibly beg the favour of the town, he hopes to receive their indulgence, which for the few remaining days shall be gratefully acknowledged by him."

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The 1738-9 winter season does not seem to have been a specially noticeable one, but space must be found for the story of a curious occurrence at the theatre.

“On Tuesday, February 6, 1739, one John Somerford tumbled from the upper gallery into the pit, being ten yards, without receiving any hurt. When the play was over, he told Mr. Rich that he had made himself free of the gallery, and hoped he should have the liberty of going into it when he pleased; to which Mr. Rich consented, provided he never came out of it in the same abrupt manner!”*

On January 17, 1739, Shirley's tragedy of the *Parricide* was produced, and apparently met with the same fate as the *Nest of Plays* previously referred to, viz. a refusal to be heard by the self-constituted censors in the pit and gallery.

The poor author, in the printed edition of his tragedy, which he dedicates to Rich, says—

“Permit me to express my wonder that 20 or 30 persons should enter into an association against a person or his productions, without the least knowledge of either, or being able to give any reason for their malice, but that it was a new play and had been licensed. That my enemies came resolved to execute before trial, may be gathered from their behaviour ere the

* From the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1739.

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play began, for at 5 o'clock they engaged, and overthrew the candles in the Music Room, and called a council of war whether they should attack the harpsichord or not ; but to your good fortune it was carried in the negative. Their expelling the Ladies from the Pit and sending for wine to drink were likewise strong indications of their arbitrary and violent dispositions."

There is a story in the *Era Almanac* of 1869 (p. 79) which I have not been able to trace to its source.

"The facetious Joe Hall (the original Lockit in *The Beggar's Opera*), in 1739, when the scene room at Covent Garden was on fire and the audience greatly alarmed, was ordered by Rich, the manager, to run on the stage and explain the matter, which honest Joe did in the following extraordinary address: 'Ladies and gentlemen, for Heaven's sake don't be frightened—don't stir—keep your seats—the fire is almost extinguished; but if it was *not*—we have a reservoir of one hundred hogsheads of water over your heads that would drown you all in a few minutes.' " [Exit Joe!]

On March 20, 1739, Genest records (for Ryan's benefit) a performance of the "*Provoked Husband* with the comic part of the masque of *Acis and Galatea*," called the *Country Wedding*. Genest further describes it as a "musical Trifle."

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It is not impossible that the music performed was Handel's composition to the version by Gay, first performed, it is believed, at Cannons in 1721, and revived at the Haymarket in 1732 (not recorded by Genest). This is, of course, mere conjecture, but the juxtaposition of Rich, Handel, and Gay's names is so frequent that it is quite within the bounds of probability.

On April 9, 1739, *Hamlet* was performed for a fund promoted for a Shakespear monument. The summer season ended on June 5, and the theatre reopened on August 2, with a benefit performance for two infant daughters of the late Mrs. Jane Cibber. On April 25 the old Covent Garden actor, William Bullock (*q.v.*), made his last appearance. January 23, 1740, saw a violent riot at Drury Lane, caused by Fleetwood, the manager, "billing" an actress who did not appear. On February 12, 1740, we find the name of Grimaldi [1713-1788], father of the famous clown, taking the part of Pantaloon to the Harlequin of Lun (Rich) in the latter's new pantomime, or, as Genest calls it, "opera of *Orpheus and Euridice*." In this one of the principal hits was made by a mechanical serpent or dragon that, says Mr. Lawrence, realistically squirmed about the stage. The cast was as follows: Orpheus, Salway; Pluto, Leveridge; Ascalax (his attendant), Laguerre; Eurydice,

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Miss Young ; Rhodope (Queen of Thrace), Mrs. Lampe ; Harlequin, Mr. Lun ; Pantaloon, Grimaldi ; Squire Gawkey, Bencraft ; Drudge (servant to Pantaloon), Hippisley ; Columbine, Miss Kilby ; Mrs. Mannerley (mother to Gawkey), Mrs. Martin. It is noteworthy that the usual plan of alternate slices of comic and serious portions was not adhered to, but that a portion of each plot was developed in every act.

Orpheus and Eurydice was the cause of an acrimonious controversy carried on *coram publico* between Rich and Sir John Hill, who was, although known to fame as a literary man, not known as a dramatic writer. Shortly after the production of the pantomime, Hill published an epistle in which he accused Rich point blank of having "cribbed" the scheme of his entertainment from a play on the same subject which he, Hill, had submitted to Rich some time previously, and which Rich had returned. In support of his accusation, familiar enough to all theatrical students, he published his own production as a folio book shortly afterwards. Rich, however, was able to show, by means of a pamphlet he published, that so far from having stolen his idea, it had been maturing in his plans for the theatre for no less than twelve years. This he proved by affidavits

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made by his *employés*. Sir John Hill probably failed to perceive that the resemblance was mainly brought about by the identity in subject. At all events, he replied to Rich's explanation in a decidedly unfriendly fashion. He said that Lun had no more written the explanatory pamphlet than he had the pantomime; his title-page was concocted by Theophilus Cibber, other parts owed their origin to his collaborateur Theobald, the impertinence was Captain Egans', and only the folly was by Rich.

In spite, however, of this descent into somewhat petty personalities, it does not appear that Hill emerged from the controversy with flying colours; while Rich certainly cannot be said to have been any the worse.

Before leaving the subject, we may learn from Rich's pamphlet reply during the controversy that something like £2000 was spent on the mounting of *Orpheus*. The scenery, it seems, had been painted ten years before by Lambert.*

It will hardly be thought we are claiming too much for the subject of these chronicles if we assert that, although, perhaps, not proven by

* For further references, see *Scot's Magazine*, March 1740, reprinted in *The Drama or Theatrical Pocket Magazine*, London, W. J. Elvey, 1824, vol. vi. p. 18. (See also October, 1787, author's note.)

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documentary evidence, it is more than probable that at Covent Garden Theatre the immortal strains of “Rule Britannia” were first heard. I may admit that there is just a possibility that to the walls of old Drury Lane Theatre the honour fell, but we will let the facts speak for themselves.

On August 1, 1740, Frederick, Prince of Wales, son of George II., and father of George III., organized a *fête* at his Palace of Cliveden, near Maidenhead. The following is an extract from the *London Daily Post* of the succeeding day :—

“Last night was performed at the gardens of Cliefden (in Commemoration of the Accession of His late Majesty King George, and in Honour of the Birth of the Princess Augusta, their R.H. the Prince and Princess of Wales being present, with all their Court) a new Masque of 2 Acts, taken from the various Fortunes of Alfred the Great, by Mr. Thomson ; and performed by Mr. Quin, Mr. Milward, Mrs. Horton and others from both Theatres ; also a Masque of Music call'd *The Judgement of Paris* writ by Mr. Dryden [Congreve] and concluded with several Scenes out of Mr. Rich's Pantomime Entertainment, perform'd by himself, and others of his appointing . . . also the famous Sig^a. Le Barberini (newly arriv'd with Mr. Rich from Paris) performed several Dances and so much

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to the satisfaction of their Royal Highnesses that H.R.H. was pleas'd to make her a very handsome present. And the whole was conducted with the utmost magnificence and decorum."

Towards the end of this masque of Alfred occur the famous lines, spoken by a hermit, beginning, "When Britain first at Heaven's command." As is well known, these lines and the rest of the masque were set to music by Thos. Augustine Arne, at that time about thirty years of age. The entertainment was repeated the following night, and the book published on August 19, 1740. From the fact that at least one of the three singers mentioned, Mrs. Horton, was a Covent Garden actress, and one of the pieces performed a Covent Garden pantomime, it is not unfair to assume that the entire stage management of the Prince's entertainment was entrusted to the capable hands of John Rich (indeed, the newspaper definitely states that part of it was), and this being the case, we may not unreasonably conclude that the rehearsals for such an elaborate performance, conducted by Rich himself, and played by a number of his own company of actors, took place at his own theatre, at which there can, of course, have been no performances going on during the summer season.

It is well known that five years later, on

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March 20, 1745, in the form of an opera, it was first performed in public at Drury Lane for Mrs. Arne's (Miss Cecilia Young) benefit.

The season was further noticeable by the death of Mrs. Anne Hallam. According to Grove, during the year 1740 Dr. Boyce's first oratorio of *David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan* was composed to a libretto by John Lockman, and performed at Covent Garden Theatre.

The season of 1740-1 saw a notable first appearance on November 6 at Covent Garden. This was the Covent Garden *début*, at the age of twenty-two, of the lovely Peg Woffington, in the character of Sylvia in Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer*, but not her first appearance in London, which had been made about eight years before as a member of Madame Violante's troupe of juvenile players at the Haymarket Theatre. On this occasion, when she must have been fourteen or fifteen years of age, she performed the remarkable feat of "trebling" the parts of Captain Macheath, Mrs. Peachum, and Diana Trapes in a shortened version of *The Beggar's Opera*.*

Mr. Fitzgerald Molloy, in his entertaining "Life of Peg Woffington," gives the following account of her first interview with Mr. John Rich.

* See article by W. J. Lawrence, *Athenæum*, July 11, 1903.

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The story appears (pp. 20, 21) in "Memoirs of the celebrated Mrs. Woffington," London, J. Swan, 1750 :—

"To the residence of John Rich, situated in the then highly fashionable quarter of Bloomsbury Square, Peg Woffington betook herself, and demanded an interview with the eccentric manager; but as she refused to give her name, she found this no easy matter to obtain. According to John Galt, she paid no less than nineteen visits before she was admitted. At last she told the servant to say Miss Woffington desired to speak to Mr. Rich; when the man returned with apologies and, informing her his master would see her at once, showed her into his private apartment. Entering the room, she found the manager lounging on a sofa, a book in one hand, a china cup, from which he occasionally sipped tea, in another, whilst around him were seven and twenty cats, engaged in the various occupations of staring at him, licking his tea-cup, eating the toast from his mouth, walking round his shoulders, and frisking about him with the freedom of long-standing pets." *

The fame of Peg Woffington's achievements in the Dublin playhouse had crossed the Channel, and made the manager willing to entertain her proposal of playing at his theatre during the

* This incident was made the subject of a picture by Mr. F. Smallfield, exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1881.

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following season. A salary of £9 a week was offered her, which she accepted willingly enough, and an engagement was entered into which proved to be the starting-point of a brilliant London career. Davies gives the year of this appearance as 1738, but Genest's date is generally accepted as correct. He observes that on her first appearance only is she styled "Miss" on the bills. On the next, and always afterwards, it is "Mrs." On November 21 she first took the "breeches" part, which she was to render especially famous, that of Sir Harry Wildair in the *Constant Couple*, also by Farquhar. She acted it twenty times the first season, "with so much ease, elegance, and propriety" that it is said no male actor afterwards equalled her in it. The part of Sylvia before mentioned also demanded her dressing in the superb clothes of a man of fashion.

The company at Covent Garden this season was a remarkably strong combination, including as it did Ryan, Delane, Hippisley, Theophilus Cibber, Mrs. Horton, and Peg Woffington. The *camaraderie* for which the theatre has always been notable was in strong evidence long ago, as in this season, on January 12, 1741, the play of the *Old Bachelor* was performed at Covent Garden "for the benefit of Chetwood, late prompter at Drury Lane and now a prisoner in the King's Bench." We may note in passing

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that the wife of the *bénéficiaire* was the granddaughter of Colley Cibber, and therefore had friends at Court. On this occasion Cibber himself played the part of Fondlewife to the *Lætitia* of Peg Woffington.

On April 20, 1741, M. and Mdme. Mechel, dancers, took a benefit, and among the attractions was a pantomime entitled *Harlequin Barber*. In this Servant to Columbine was played by "Miss Bellamy, who never appeared on any stage before." *

For the 1741-2 season Rich secured the services of four famous Drury Lane performers—Mrs. Pritchard, Chapman, Woodward, and Cibber, senior. He had, however, lost those of the lovely Peg Woffington, who had quarrelled with him and had been engaged by Fleetwood and Cibber at the Lane to act with a very strong company, including Mrs. Clive, Macklin, Milward, Theo. Cibber, Delane, and—at the end of the season—David Garrick.

It is strange that neither Rich nor Fleetwood at this time thought it worth their while to engage David Garrick, who had returned from Ipswich in the preceding summer, that of 1741. Garrick would have doubtless "jumped" at the opportunity of appearing at either of the great

* *Vide* Latreille's Transcripts of London Bills [1700-1750] at the Brit. Museum.

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patent theatres, but neither of the patentees at the moment recognized the importance of the new star. Cibber and Woodward, however, were undoubtedly strong attractions. Quin was not engaged there, but played once at Covent Garden when *Cato* was performed for the benefit of Milward's widow and children, when Rich, with great kindness, gave the use of the theatre free of charge.

On March 27, 1742, a noteworthy appearance was made at the benefit of Bridgwater, one of Rich's actors. The play was *Love for Love*, in which the part of Miss Prue was announced to be acted by "Miss Georgianna Bellamy,* who never† appeared on any stage before," and at that time, if we are to believe her own account, barely out of her childhood. Chetwood, however, asserts that she was born in 1727, and not in 1733, as she herself makes out. It is curious, too, that in her "Apology for her Life" she makes no mention of the appearance on March 27 at Bridgwater's benefit. She gives the following explanation of the circumstances that led to her becoming an actress ‡:—

It appears that her mother, Mrs. Bellamy,

* She was christened "George Anne" by mistake for Georgiana, and was the daughter of Lord Tyrawley and a quakeress named "Seal," who married a Captain Bellamy just before her birth.

† The statement on the playbill was incorrect. As we have seen, the real *début* was made April 20, 1741.

‡ Vol. i. Letter vii.

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having frequently to call on Rich to get arrears of salary, her daughter became intimate with the manager's family. The Misses Rich and their young friend, after the manner of young people, got up a private performance of *Othello*, in which Georgiana played the title rôle! Quite accidentally, Rich himself happened to see a rehearsal, and was struck by the sweetness of the girl's voice. He offered her an engagement, and (in Letter viii.) she says—

“At the time I entered into an agreement with Mr. Rich I was just fourteen, of a figure not inelegant, a powerful voice, light as the gossamer, of inexhaustible spirits, and possessed of some humour.”

As we have previously indicated, the statement regarding her age is not reliable, but she was evidently a very attractive and high-spirited girl, for about the time of her *début* she succeeded in captivating the heart of Harry Woodward, who proposed and was refused.

The so-called *début* was little short of a fiasco, however, and no more was heard of Miss Bellamy as an actress until 1744.

On May 4 *Æsop* was performed, “for the entertainment of the Grand Master and the Brethren of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons—for the benefit of a brother who has had great misfortunes.”

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And the bill further announces, "with Songs in Masonry by Salway and Bencraft" (the latter subsequently became the son-in-law of Rich and joint manager of Covent Garden with Beard). On May 7 a benefit was given for one Mullart, and Lawrence the box-keeper, and on June 1 the season closed.

During almost the whole of this season the proprietors of the two patent theatres had to contend with the enormous sensation that was being created by Garrick at Goodman's Fields, which caused an alarming deficiency in their own respective treasuries. Consequently they resolved to crush the opposition by exercising the rights conferred on them as monopolists by their patents, and so far succeeded that Giffard, the manager, was obliged to cut his season short on April 24 and shut up the theatre. Fleetwood, the manager of Drury Lane, was, moreover, as we have seen, successful in capturing the new star for his theatre, at the then unheard-of salary of 600 guineas.*

The 1742-3 season, however, opened with a master-stroke by Rich, probably intended to counterbalance the advent of Garrick at Drury Lane. He engaged the then most fascinating actress and singer of her time, Mrs Cibber, who had not been seen in London since

* *Gentleman's Magazine*, October, 1743.

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1738, and to whose career we have already briefly referred (see p. 59). The parts were "all new dressed, and the theatre new decorated," and on September 22, 1742, opened with Quin as Othello and Mrs. Cibber as Desdemona.

The facts of this actress's romantic career may be briefly stated. She was without doubt a woman of extraordinary personal attractions, and had been allowed, or indeed almost forced, by her rascally husband * to form an attachment for a gentleman of means named William Sloper, with whom she eventually eloped. This was no part of her husband's intentions, and she was forcibly taken from her lover's arms, only to be again rescued from her husband's unwelcome attentions and again restored to the protection of Mr. Sloper, with whom she lived happily afterwards.

Mrs. Cibber's parts during her first season at Covent Garden included Desdemona, Cordelia, Isabella, Indiana in *The Conscious Lovers*, Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, Monimia in *The Orphan*, Lætitia in *The Old Bachelor*, Elvira in *The Spanish Fryar*, and Lady Anne in *Richard III*.

On October 13, 1742, Genest says that Garrick acted Richard at Covent Garden, a statement I have not been able to verify, but which I see no reason to doubt.

* Theophilus Cibber.



MRS. CIBBER.

From the Painting by T. Hudson, engraved by J. Faber, 1746.

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On February 14, 1743, by command of the Prince and Princess of Wales, a benefit performance was given to Mrs. Porter, on the occasion of her retirement from the stage. This well-known tragic actress had been the theatrical attendant of Mrs. Barry, whose artistic mantle she inherited. She had taken such parts as Queen Katherine and Queen Elizabeth in the *Albion Queens* with great success, and was thought by many of her contemporaries one of the greatest actresses of her day.

In the year 1743 we again find Handel engaging Covent Garden Theatre, this time for oratorio. On February 17, 1743, the following advertisement appeared in the *Daily Advertiser*:—

“By Subscription.—At the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden to-morrow the 18th inst. will be performed a new oratorio called *Samson*.* Tickets will be delivered to subscribers (on paying their subscription money) at Mr. Handel’s house, in Brooke Street, near Hanover Square. Attendance will be given from nine o’clock in the morning till 3 in the afternoon. Pit and boxes to be put together, and no person to be admitted without tickets, which will be delivered that day at the office in Covent Garden Theatre, at half a guinea each; first gallery 5s.; upper gallery 3s. 6d. Notice—Each subscriber is to

* The three leading parts in *Samson* were created by Beard, Mrs. Cibber, and Signora Avoglia respectively.

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pay six guineas upon taking out his subscription ticket, which entitles him to three box tickets every night of Mr. Handel's first six performances in Lent. And if Mr. Handel should have any more performances after the first six nights, each subscriber may continue on the same conditions."

The following letter in *Faulkner's Journal** for March 12 to 15 shows that the venture met with fair success:—

"Our friend Mr. Handel is very well and things have taken a quite different turn here from what they did some time past, for the public will be no longer imposed on by Italian singers and wrong-headed undertakers of bad operas, but find out the merits of Mr. Handel's compositions and English performances. That gentleman is now more esteemed than ever. The new oratorio called *Samson* which he composed since he left Ireland has been performed 4 times to more crowded audiences than ever were seen, more people being turned away for want of room each night than hath been at the Italian opera. Mr. Dubourg (lately arrived from Dublin) performed at the last and met with uncommon applause from the Royal Family and audience."†

* A Dublin newspaper of the day.

† Handel's performances in 1743 included *Samson* eight times, *Messiah* three times, *L'Allegro* and *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day* once each (Schoelcher).

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Schoelcher states that “not one of the London Journals says a word about this season, in which were produced for the first time *Samson* and *The Messiah* !”

The famous tenor singer, Beard, who frequently performed for Rich, created the part of Samson, and, says Schoelcher, thereby raised himself to the first rank of singers. This great artist, who had been one of the “children of the Chapel Royal,” like so many other excellent musicians, created an extraordinary sensation by marrying, in January, 1739, Lady Henrietta Herbert, only daughter of James, Earl of Waldegrave, and widow of Lord Ed. Herbert. It can be but faintly imagined what a terrible *mésalliance* such a step on the lady's part was considered. Lady M. Wortley Montagu jokingly advised her relations to poison her ! However, the marriage turned out an exceedingly happy one. Beard, who was not only an artist, but a good English gentleman of high moral character, tenderly loved her, and upon her death, fourteen years afterwards, raised a fine monument to her memory in St. Pancras Churchyard with a touching inscription.

A yet greater honour was in store this season for Mr. Rich's theatre, little though he dreamt of it as such. On March 23, 1743, Handel gave

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there the first performance* in England of his immortal work, *The Messiah*.† It was repeated on March 25 and 29. At that time and up to 1749 he announced it, says his biographer, simply as “A Sacred Oratorio.” This was owing to his fear that his enemies might foment some scandal upon seeing the name of the Messiah upon a playbill. He did not, however, escape by his ruse, for the *Daily Advertiser* of March 31, 1743, contains the following lines, evidently intended as a reply to an attack upon Handel:—

“Wrote extempore by a Gentleman on reading the *Universal Spectator*, on Mr. Handel’s new oratorio, performed at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden—

“Cease, zealots, cease to blame these heavenly lays
For seraphs fit to sing Messiah’s praise,
Nor for your trivial argument assign
The theatre not fit for praise divine.
These hallowe^d lays to music give new grace
To virtue, awe and sanctify the place;
To harmony like *his*, celestial power is given
To exalt the soul from earth, and make of hell a heaven.”

The letter from the “London Correspondent”

* *The Messiah* had been first performed in public in the previous year, on April 13, 1742, at the Music Hall in Fishamble Street, Dublin.

† There is a tradition that the custom of the audience standing to hear the “Hallelujah Chorus” dates from this performance, when those present were so awed and startled by the magnificence of the strains that the whole audience, including King George II., who was present, spontaneously rose and remained standing till the chorus ended.

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of *Faulkner's Journal*, already quoted, referring to the effect produced upon London audiences by *Samson*, is the only contemporary comment that has survived upon this season ; but it is, indeed, a curious reflection upon the musical criticism of the age that no more than a casual mention by a gossipy chronicler of these monumental works should have remained to attest to their reception.

In connection with the subject, the following remarks from an eminent authority on theatrical matters, the late Mr. R. W. Lowe, who delivered them at a lecture at the Royal Institution in 1894, are of interest, notwithstanding that they apply more immediately to dramatic criticism—

“Young as, comparatively speaking, the newspaper was, the art of dramatic criticism was younger still. There were no properly qualified dramatic critics before the beginning of the century, and they were not common half a century ago. In Addison's day no one dreamed of criticising the plays in the newspapers. The playhouse advertisements were the only dramatic news which appeared as a rule, and these were, curiously enough, inserted gratis, probably as a matter of news. It is a curious fact that the *Daily Post* and the *Daily Courant* in the middle of last century contained announcements from stage-managers informing the public that these two journals alone were supplied with correct

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information, and that all other announcements were obtained by hearsay, and were not to be trusted. In 1741 only a couple of lines in the most obscure corner of the paper announced the astounding *furore* which welcomed Garrick on to the London stage. When Garrick played a new part there were no two-column notices in the *Daily Telegraph* of the period; such dramatic criticism as existed found publicity in the shape of pamphlets. It was not until Leigh Hunt began to interest himself in the subject that true dramatic criticism began, and even during the career of celebrated critics like Hazlitt, Forster, Lewes, and Oxenford dramatic criticism as now understood occupied a very small share in journalism. Delane told Oxenford not to introduce controversial matter into his theatre notices, because the *Times* was not the place for discussing such trivial matter as the merits or demerits of plays."

In the 1743-4 season Mrs. Clive, another Drury Lane favourite rapidly rising into fame, took the place of Mrs. Cibber, playing such parts as Ophelia to Quin's Ghost and Ryan's Hamlet, and Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*. Rich, as was frequently his good-natured way, lent the theatre this season, on November 17, "for the benefit of the widow and four small children of the late Henry Carey." Mrs. Clive acted. It is generally stated on somewhat slender evidence



KITTY CLIVE.

From the Painting by J. Ellys, engraved by J. Tinney.

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that, although he was then eighty years old, Carey put an end to his life by suicide, the reason being variously given as due to pecuniary troubles, domestic unhappiness, and the malevolence of fellow musicians! He left six children behind him, in great poverty. The house at which the tragic event took place was in Great Warner Street, Clerkenwell. Genest's authority for the following quaint paragraph relating to Carey's death is the *London Daily Post*, October 4, 1743: "This morning Mr. Henry Carey, well known to the musical world for his droll compositions, got out of bed from his wife in perfect health, and was soon after found dead." We have before (see p. 62) alluded to Carey's fame as an author, song-writer, and composer, but it must not be forgotten that he has another claim upon the attention of musical antiquaries, owing to the energetic attempts made by his son, George Saville Carey, and others to establish for him the authorship of the National Anthem. The whole thing has been threshed out over and over again, and is dealt with exhaustively by Dr. W. H. Cummings, in his interesting little monograph on the subject.* From this it clearly appears that Carey's claims to be the originator of the air are "out of the running." But before we leave the subject it is interesting to quote

* Published by Novello.

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part of a letter of Dr. Burney's, in Dr. Cummings's possession, and first printed in his little book. It gives a very distinct account of the Anthem's origin, as now generally accepted.

“Mrs. Arne's son, Dr. Arne, composer to Drury Lane, at the desire of Mr. Fleetwood, the patentee, harmonized this loyal song for the stage; and he made a trio of it for Mrs. Cibber, Beard, and Reinhold, with instrumental accompaniments, without knowing the author of the words or original melody; and it continued to be sung and called for a full year after the suppression of the Rebellion.* I, then a pupil of Mr. Arne, was desired by some of the Covent Garden singers with whom I was acquainted, and who knew that I was a bit of a composer, to set parts to the old tune for the *new house*, as it was then called, which I did, utterly ignorant who wrote the words or put them to music.”

Dr. Cummings shows conclusively that the composer of the original air, afterwards altered by Arne into much the same form as it is used to-day, was Dr. John Bull, one of the organists of the Chapel Royal to James I., and who died in 1628.

That Rich's affairs were none too prosperous at this time seems to be proved by the existence of a copy of a mortgage† executed by him to a certain Martha Launder for the sum of £1200,

* Of 1745.

† See Appendix.

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whereby he assigned as her security the original lease (dated March 16, 1730), granted him by the Duke of Bedford, of the property in Covent Garden ; nor was it until April 10, 1758, that the mortgage was paid off and the premises re-assigned to Mr. Rich.

On March 13, 1744, for Mrs. Clive's benefit, Rich produced Shakespear's *Merchant of Venice* for the first time at Covent Garden, Mrs. Clive herself acting Portia.

On March 31 *Hamlet* was performed, with the already famous Irish actor-manager Sheridan (father of the still more celebrated dramatist) in the title rôle, being his first appearance on the English stage.

On October 25, 1744, at St. Paul's, Covent Garden, Rich married for the third time, choosing for his wife Mrs. Priscilla Stevens, one of the minor actresses in his company. This lady began life as a coffee-house attendant, but before her marriage she had been living with Rich as his housekeeper. She is said to have embraced the Methodist faith with all its austere regard of the theatre, and to have caused poor Rich to lead a somewhat worried existence in consequence.

Smollett, who wrote the libretto of an opera entitled *Alcestes*, or *Alceste* (q.v.),* had some

* See p. 120 for reference to *The Choice of Hercules*, in which the music composed by Handel for *Alcestes* was partly incorporated.

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quarrel with the manager, which subsequently evoked the following scathing allusion to the third Mrs. Rich and her unpleasant disposition, in "Roderick Random" (1748): "The poor man's head, which was not naturally very clear, had been disordered with superstitions, and he laboured under the tyranny of a wife and the terror of hell fire at the same time."

1744-5 was a season more distinguished at Drury Lane than Covent Garden, for the former theatre had a monopoly of the great players, including as it did Garrick, Mrs. Woffington, Delane, Mrs. Cibber, Macklin, and Sheridan. Against this galaxy Rich could only present Quin, Mrs. Pritchard, Ryan, and afterwards Mrs. Clive. Rich, however, again brought forward, as he was fond of doing for youthful talent, on November 22, Miss Bellamy (*q.v.*), in the tragedy of *The Orphan*. It seems that Quin, who "ruled the theatre with a rod of iron," strongly opposed her appearance, on the score of her extreme youth, but upon her succeeding brilliantly, took her in his arms and exclaimed, "Thou art a divine creature, and the true spirit is in thee." To compensate her for the small salary he was paying her, Rich gave her a benefit free of all charge upon one of his own nights.

It must not be omitted that Handel had, in the Lent of this year (1744), as now became

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his annual custom, taken the theatre for twelve * oratorio performances, which included two new ones, *Joseph and His Brethren* and *Semele*. This time, however, probably taught by previous experience, he reduced the price of the subscription to four guineas. In the autumn of 1744 he advertised (October 20) his intention of giving twenty-four performances at the Haymarket, but heavy losses compelled him to close at the 16th. It is singular that *The Messiah* was not included in these.

On February 15, 1745, Rich produced a play by Colley Cibber, entitled, *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John*, which, while purporting to be a new play, and an improvement upon the treatment of the theme by Shakespear, was, it appears, a shocking specimen of the author's incompetence and impertinence. It is noteworthy that no less than three members of the family took parts in the performance—old Cibber himself, who had then lost all his teeth, and could only mumble, and who took the part of Cardinal Pandulph; his son Theophilus, who was the Dauphin; and his daughter, Miss Jenny Cibber, who took Prince Arthur. There can, of course, have been little really to please the audience in the spectacle of an old man past seventy

* Handel's performances in Lent, 1744, included *Semele* four times, *Joseph* four times, *Samson* twice, *Saul* twice (Schoelcher).

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years of age struggling against such drawbacks. The son's acting is said to have come in for severe condemnation; and old Cibber did not again appear on the stage after the withdrawal of his play on February 26, 1745.

The Cibbers did not long continue with Rich, nor, it appears, had he been able to keep Mrs. Clive, who published a pamphlet in November, 1744, complaining of the conduct of both the Covent Garden and Drury Lane managers.

There was at this time some sort of friendly agreement [doubtless supplementing the financial one (see ante, p. 49)] between the rival houses not to compete unduly with each other, for on December 9, 1745, on the performance at Drury Lane of Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer* for a benefit, we find there was no play at Covent Garden. The benefit on this occasion was for the relief of the veterans of the Scotch Rebellion campaign, which had caused the theatres at this time to be in some measure deserted. Shuter, afterwards a famous comedian, made his *début* as a lad this season. Handel's performances in Lent, 1745, took place at the King's Theatre.

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CHAPTER IV

1745–1760

THE 1745–6 season opened on September 13 with *Hamlet*, but without the strong company that had previously performed, neither Quin nor Mrs. Cibber being engaged, except for benefits; but on November 9 we find Cibber, junior, engaged again; and on December 14, Mrs. Cibber having generously undertaken to play Polly in *The Beggar's Opera* for the Scotch veterans, Rich offered his theatre free of expense for three nights, with the splendid result that he was able to pay to the fund the sum of £602 1s. as the profits, all the performers having given their services. On January 22 *Macbeth* was performed, the whole Royal Family being present.

June 11, 1746, was a memorable day for Covent Garden. In pursuance of an agreement with Rich, Garrick made his first appearance there in *King Lear*. The agreement was for six plays—five of them by Shakespear—*King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III.*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and

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Stratagem. The season was a brief one, ending on June 27 ; but during that time Garrick and Rich each netted £300 for the six performances.

In the words of Davies, Rich “ condescended to put some hundreds of pounds in his pocket through a channel he disliked.” The short season of plays had the further effect, a fortunate one for Rich and Covent Garden, of inducing both the manager and the actor to come to terms for the ensuing season, greatly to their mutual advantage.

Handel, in his Lenten season at Covent Garden this year, produced, on February 14, 1746, his *Occasional Oratorio*. His position at this time was truly deplorable. In addition to the humiliation, painful to any honourable man, of being temporarily a bankrupt, he had the further mortification of knowing that his financial downfall was his enemies’ triumph. But he never lost courage, and manfully continued his efforts to redeem past losses. The *Occasional Oratorio* contains a reference to the current topic of the day, the suppression of the Jacobite Rebellion, in its words, “ War shall cease, Welcome peace,” adapted to the opening bars of Arne’s “ Rule Britannia,” which Handel, with the conscious freedom from conventionality of a great genius, borrowed for the purposes of his work.

The previous season poor Handel had started

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with the laudable intention of giving his subscribers twenty-four performances, but lack of support compelled him to suspend them at the 16th. He now advertised his intention of making good the deficit of the previous season, and, doubtless to his own great comfort, did it, although the season terminated as early as February 26.

Rich, with his usual enterprise, not only engaged Garrick for the autumn season, 1746-7, but re-engaged Quin and Mrs. Cibber. On October 20 Quin played Richard III., and on the 22nd Garrick opened with Hamlet. On the 24th Quin played Cato ; and on the 27th Garrick appeared as Lear. But on the 31st Garrick played Richard III., thus giving the public a chance of comparing the new easy style of acting which he inaugurated with the old stilted declamatory style of Quin. The result was disastrous to Quin, for we read that while he scarcely drew a decent house, Garrick's impersonation brought a crowded audience.

November 14, 1746, was a unique and splendid occasion ; on that night Rowe's *Fair Penitent* was performed, in which Garrick and Quin, the representatives of the old and new schools of acting, both appeared in characters of equal importance, with Mrs. Cibber as Calista, the heroine of the play. The performance met

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with such shouts of applause that the two actors were considerably embarrassed, but it was an immense success, and was often repeated.

On that memorable evening Richard Cumberland, the dramatist, in whose play Garrick afterwards acted, and at that time a scholar in the sixth form at Westminster School, was permitted to occupy a seat in the front row of the gallery at Covent Garden. He has left a lively description of the scene in his "Memoirs" (vol. i. p. 80).

"Quin," he says, "presented himself upon the rising of the curtain in a green velvet coat embroidered down the seams, an enormous full-bottomed periwig, rolled stockings and high-heeled, square-toed shoes. With very little variation of cadence, and in a deep full tone, accompanied by a sawing kind of action which had more of the senate than of the stage in it, he rolled out his heroics with an air of dignified indifference that seemed to disdain the plaudits that were bestowed upon him. Mrs. Cibber, in a key high-pitched, but sweet withal, sung or rather recited Rowe's harmonious strain something in the manner of the improvisatores. It was so extremely wanting in contrast that though it did not wound the ear, it wearied it; when she had once recited two or three speeches I could anticipate the manner of every succeeding one. It was like a long, old, legendary ballad of innumerable stanzas, every one of

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which is sung to the same tune, eternally chiming in the ear without variation or relief."

Then Cumberland describes the new style exemplified in Davy Garrick. Of neither Quin nor Mrs. Cibber, who were in the cast, does Cumberland say much, but—

"When, after a long and eager expectation, I first beheld little Garrick, then young and light and active in every muscle and feature, come bounding on the stage—Heavens, what a transition! It seemed as if a whole century had been stept over in the transition of a single scene. Old things were done away, and a new order at once brought forward, bright and luminous and dearly destined to dispel the barbarisms of a tasteless age, too long superstitiously devoted to the illusions of imposing declamation."

It is only fair to state that in certain other plays in which Garrick took parts unsuited to him, notably Hotspur in *Henry IV.* to Quin's Falstaff, the latter showed his powers to far greater advantage, which Garrick was not slow to find out, for he very soon refused to resume the character.

It is fair evidence, however, of the good sense and comradeship of these great artists that they were able to play through an entire season without the appearance of enmity.

It must be remarked that so far this season

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Rich had not produced a single new piece, but relied entirely upon the unique attraction of the great names in his bills to draw large houses. On January 17, 1747, Garrick gave fresh evidence of his versatility by acting in a farce of his own composition, entitled *Miss in her Teens; or, The Medley of Lovers*. The play was well conceived, the plot a likely one, and the dialogue excellent; but the *motif* of the play hinging upon fashions, the *raison d'être* for its performance passed away with those fashions. During its first and several succeeding seasons, however, it maintained its place among the successful pieces of the day. On February 12 another new piece was performed, attached to which there is a flavour of romantic history. This was Dr. Hoadley's comedy of *The Suspicious Husband*, in which the main incidents of the plot are said to have been founded on George I.'s inhuman treatment of his wife, the unfortunate Sophia Dorothea, whom he imprisoned in Hanover upon suspicion of her having had an intrigue with Count Königsmark. The only evidence there was against the poor princess consisted in her having been found asleep one night with the count's hat lying near. This incident was introduced into the play, in which, moreover, her guilt is evidently regarded as proven. The author dedicated it to the King,

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George II., who rewarded him with a present of a thousand guineas, and is said to have been so pleased with Garrick's acting as the Lothario of the piece that he went to see it several times.

Garrick, unfortunately, fell ill during the season, and thus caused the alteration of several plans made for the production of plays. Among them was Quin's benefit, in which Garrick had been announced to play Jaffier in *Venice Preserved*. Rich was decidedly unfortunate this season, for, besides Garrick, a host in himself, at various times he was without the services of Mrs. Cibber and Hippisley.

In Letter xxviii. of her "Memoirs," Miss Bellamy gives an interesting account of a visit she paid to Rich at his country house, Cowley, near Uxbridge, a testimony, if one were needed, of the genuine and kindly hospitality the eccentric manager could show to his friends, and one which affords a pleasant glimpse of the autocrat of Covent Garden in another character.

The season came to an end on May 29, 1747, Garrick having on the previous April 9 signed an agreement purchasing a share in the patent of Drury Lane for the sum, it is said, of £8000, with the proviso that he should himself assume the management.

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Handel had contributed to the lustre of this memorable season by the first performance of *Judas Macchabeus** on April 1, 1747. It was written by command of Frederick, Prince of Wales, to commemorate the return of the infamous Duke of Cumberland, his brother, who had, on April 16, won the Battle of Culloden. It attained instant popularity, partly, no doubt, owing to the political circumstances attending its production, but far more, we hope, from its intrinsic sublimity. Handel himself, we are told, performed it thirty-eight times, and on the thirtieth occasion the receipts amounted to no less than £400. One of the circumstances attending it is the popularity it enjoyed among the Jews, who not unnaturally found the story of the deeds of one of their national heroes pleasant telling. It should be mentioned, however, that the famous chorus, "See the Conquering Hero," was not added to it till a year later, in 1748, when it was revived "with additions."

During the 1746-7 season Rich's profits for nine months amounted to no less than £8500. But, if we may trust Davies in his account of the eccentric manager's doings,† it brought

* Schoelcher, the biographer of Handel, adopts this mode of spelling Macchabeus throughout.

† "Life of Garrick," vol. li. p. 104.

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him no apparent gratification, for he displayed the greatest contempt for a public who preferred to see serious acting to witnessing his "raree shows."

"Often would he take a peep through the curtain, and as often from disgust at . . . a full audience break out into . . . 'What are you there? Well, much good may it do you!' He might," says Davies, "have easily fixed Garrick in his service long before the latter bought a share of the Drury Lane patent, but he showed absolutely no disposition to do so. He rather seemed to consider it as a release from a disagreeable engagement, and consoled himself with mimicking the great actor. It was a ridiculous sight to see the old man upon his knees repeating Lear's curse to his daughter, after Garrick's manner, as he termed it; while some of the players who stood around him gave him loud applause, and others, though they were obliged to join in the general approbation, heartily pitied his folly and despised his ignorance."

If Davies' incredible account of Rich's behaviour has any foundation in fact, his further account of the demoralization that overtook the Covent Garden management as the result of Garrick's departure with so many capable and first-rate performers becomes incomprehensible. Surely Rich can only have been pleased to see

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his theatre deserted by the fools who preferred Garrick's acting to his clowning !

It was with a deplorably weakened company that Covent Garden opened for the season of 1747-8, Garrick having now got an immensely strong company at Drury Lane, including Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Clive, Mrs. Woffington, Macklin and his wife, Delane, Yates, and Mrs. Pritchard ; in fact, he had made a clean sweep of the theatrical boards. Quin, in disgust at Garrick's success and the public's coolness towards himself, retired to Bath, whence, as a mild hint that he was open to negotiations, he wrote the following letter to Rich :—

“ I am at Bath. Your's, JAMES QUIN.”

To which Rich replied—

“ Stay there and be damn'd. Your's, JOHN RICH.”

The only actors of celebrity left to Covent Garden were Ryan, Cibber, junior, Mrs. Horton, and Foote. But later in the season Rich engaged Quin again, and on April 6, 1748, he played Othello “towards the relief of the unhappy sufferers by the late fire on Cornhill.” All this season business was very bad at Covent Garden, and on several occasions in February the houses were so poor that no performance was given.

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On February 12, 1748, there died a famous comedian in John Hippisley, who is said to have started his career in the theatre as a candle-snuffer. At any rate, he became a highly successful actor, and served with Rich either at Lincoln's Inn Fields or Covent Garden almost the whole of his life. His comic facial expression was, it seems, much heightened by an accidental burn, which distorted his face. He told Quin one day that he intended to bring his son up as an actor. "If that is the case," said Quin, "it is high time to burn him."

Handel had produced at Covent Garden on March 9, 1748, *Alexander Bælus*, which was repeated three times, and *Joshua*, which was performed four times, while *Judas Macchabeus* was performed six times in the season.

An incident which must also be recorded is that connected with the abortive agreement with Jean Mounet of the Paris Opera Comique, an affair which can hardly be said to redound to the credit of the playgoing public of the day.

Jean Mounet is one of the most interesting personages on the French stage in the eighteenth century. Born in 1710 in poor circumstances, and left an orphan at eight, he gradually worked his way in the world until he became manager of the Opera Comique. It was during the flood tide of his success as a theatrical manager that

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he brought his company over to England, and he has told the story of the expedition in his memoirs.

“In the month of August, 1748,” writes Jean, “M. Rich, manager of a London theatre, proposed to me, through a friend, that I should take over to London a company of French comedians, asking me at the same time what I thought the cost would be. I answered through the same channel that I could not undertake such an enterprise without seeing M. Rich beforehand. I accordingly went over to London and had a long interview with M. Rich. It was agreed between us that I should engage a company of French artistes; that I should manage the company; that M. Rich should bear the expenses, giving me a suitable honorarium for my services; and that we should stage alternately French and English pieces.”

The contract, however, was broken off almost as soon as it was made. Rich was advised by his friends to abandon the project on the ground that the presence of a French company in London would give great offence to John Bull, an opinion which subsequent events fully justified. Poor Mounet had already made arrangements with Parisian artistes, and great was his chagrin at Rich's conduct.

“I now addressed myself to M. Garrick, to

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whom I was a perfect stranger. I proposed that he should replace M. Rich as guarantor. He refused, however, to do this, giving the soundest reasons for his refusal, and bestowing upon me advice in every way worthy of the uprightness and honesty of his character."

Jean, however, was not to be beaten. He rented the Haymarket Theatre (*le petit Théâtre de Haymarket*), and opened a subscription list, which was sufficiently responded to. The preliminaries now fairly settled, Jean left for Paris to bring his company back with him.

Mounet returned to London towards the end of October, 1748, and found that the news of his projected season at the Haymarket had created general excitement. "There were people for and against my enterprise in this town," he says. His enemies chiefly consisted of English actors and French refugees. These latter were especially hostile. With the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes still fresh in their memories, they let slip no opportunity of "avenging themselves" upon their hated fellow-countrymen. The Press of the day took up arms against the alien invasion. "The papers were full of satires and epigrams against me and my spectacle," says Jean, plaintively. In this emergency Jean cast about for patrons. He was fortunate enough to obtain a patent of authorization for his show from the

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Duke of Grafton, the then Lord Chamberlain ; and a Lord G—— (one of the greatest of English nobles, says Jean) became his special patron, with the result that the best people in town rallied to the side of the Haymarket spectacle and its plucky manager.

The spectacle was opened on November 8, 1749, says Jean, in his account of it, and the enemy turned up in great force. The gallery, half an hour before the performance began, was crowded with refugees and other people determined to create a disturbance. At six o'clock Lord G——, accompanied by thirty gentlemen, all armed with heavy sticks, took the seats they had retained beforehand. Lord G—— and the Duke of D——, in order to better observe the rowdies, stationed themselves *aux secondes loges*. There were only three ladies present, a lady of quality and two English actresses. The orchestra began the overture, but immediately it did so the conspirators thundered out an English song, the refrain of which ran, "We don't want French players." The curtain went up, however, and the play—the name of which Jean does not give—began. Straightway a perfect hail of oranges, apples, and other congenial missiles descended upon the stage from the gallery. One of the actresses, who later on joined the Francaise, was struck on the neck by a candle. Not a sound

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could be heard in the terrific din raised by the rowdies in the gallery. Lord G——endeavoured to calm the disturbance, but his appeals were drowned by the refrain, “*Nous ne voulons point de comediens Français.*” Then Lord G——, placing himself at the head of his thirty stout friends, invaded the gallery. There appears to have been a design to carry the stage by storm, and evict the French players, for Jean tells us that some officers of the army drew their swords and faced the angry crowd. By this time the rowdy patriots had gained possession of the pit, and here a very vigorous free fight took place.

Jean's friends, by a very active use of their fists and cudgels, ultimately succeeded in restoring order, and the two plays down for presentation went well. However, such was the bitter feeling against the French artistes that the whole company had to be escorted to their lodgings by the officers and gentlemen who had espoused their cause.

The next night saw a renewal of the disturbance, and in an aggravated form. The defence had taken the precaution of engaging a corps of Thames watermen, who, armed with formidable cudgels, were stationed at various parts of the theatre. But the patriots had organized themselves, and had chosen a leader

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in the person of a naval lieutenant. At a given moment the lieutenant gave the signal, and the free fight was renewed in every part of the theatre. Victory rested with the friends of order. The patriots in the gallery got so rough a handling from the watermen that they clambered down into the pit, there to receive a second trouncing. Jean describes the scene as a "horrible tumult." The French actresses, terrified out of their lives, hid themselves away in their dressing-rooms "*avec des officiers qui les rassurent.*" Again the patriots were soundly thrashed, and, when quiet was restored, the programme of the evening was proceeded with. Jean assures us that in the desperate two nights' engagement no one was killed, but he insists upon the terrible injuries sustained by the combatants on both sides. The third and fourth representations went off without disturbance.

"My friends took the same precautions," says Jean, "but they were unnecessary, for the enemy did not put in an appearance. My company played in perfect peace, and, speaking generally, the performance was greatly appreciated."

And now Jean looked forward to a long and prosperous run, but his hopes were doomed to disappointment. The trouble this time was a

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Parliamentary election. Lord Chesterfield and the "Duc de Montaign," who were among Jean's foremost patrons, advised him to close the theatre during the progress of the election. From his past experience of the patriots, Jean saw the wisdom of this advice, and closed the theatre. Then, just as Jean was on the point of reopening the Haymarket, came a staggering blow. The Lord Chamberlain vetoed the performances. So the Haymarket remained closed, and the French comedians troubled English patriotism no more. But Jean was not yet at the end of his troubles. His company began pressing him for their salaries, which it appears had been fixed at double the rate then paid in France. He was waiting upon the nightly receipts; they cannot have amounted to much. Two of his patrons, Lord Stafford and a member of Parliament, helped him at first out of their own purses, but ultimately Jean got into serious difficulties. At last, however, he managed to pay off his clamorous and exacting company, and returned to Paris. He never tempted the English playgoer again.

With the 1748-9 season the see-saw of popularity tilted back to Covent Garden, for we find engaged there Mrs. Woffington, Delane, and Sparks, Quin, Miss Bellamy, and Miss Ward. The season opened with the *Provoked Wife*, in which Peg Woffington made her reappearance

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after an absence of some years. Her reappearance at Covent Garden this season was doubtless due to the new position of Garrick at Drury Lane. The latter's accession to the managership of the theatre had taken place, it will be remembered, in the previous year. He was at this time formally engaged to Mdlle. Violette, the Austrian danseuse, who had been introduced into the highest society in England by the Countess of Burlington. His youthful affection for Peg Woffington had long since disappeared, and she, still in the prime of her wonderful beauty and attraction, was not likely to stay on at Drury Lane to see her rival occupying that place which Garrick had, no doubt, promised to give her, that of his affianced wife. There was again a fine series of Shakespearian plays, in which the ever-charming Mrs. Woffington played a number of Shakespear's most fascinating heroines, while Quin, a really great actor, Garrick notwithstanding, displayed his powers to a faithful following, and this time undimmed by the proximity of a greater artist on the same stage.

Peg Woffington's characters this season included the part of Lady Jane Grey in Rowe's tragedy, in which she scored a great triumph. Never, it was said, had her beautiful face and graceful figure been seen to better advantage, whilst her pathos moved the house to tears.

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The same year (1748) Molloy records her visit to Paris in order to benefit by some study under Madame Dumesnil, then universally recognized as the head of her profession. Peg Woffington studied her closely, and on her return played Veturia in Thomson's *Coriolanus*, never hesitating, like the true artist she was, to paint her lovely face with wrinkles in order to play the part with propriety.

When she played Cleopatra in *All for Love* for Quin's benefit on March 12, 1750, the elegant Duchess of Queensbury honoured the performance with her presence, and was somewhat indiscreetly taken behind the scenes between the acts, where to her extreme disgust she beheld the lovely Queen of Egypt discussing a pot of porter with one of her boon companions.*

Towards the close of the season a romantic episode occurred at Covent Garden during the performance of the *Provoked Wife*, in which the heroine, Lady Fanciful, was played by Miss Bellamy. The actress was waiting for her call between the acts when her lover, a Mr. Metham, asked her to see him in the hall.† She complied. He caught her in his arms and carried her—not unwillingly on her part, be it said—to a coach in waiting, and they drove off. Quin was

* *Vide* "Bellamy's Life," vol. i. Letter 35.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i. Letter 35.

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thereupon obliged to apologise for her absence, and the play was terminated without her.

Genest has a note to the effect that Rich, taking advantage of the sensation created by the so-called "Bottle Conjurer" swindle at the Haymarket, put on to the stage a pantomime in which Harlequin, to the amazement, or perhaps amusement, of the audiences, "not only went into a quart bottle, but after that Don Jumpedo jumped down his own throat."

Handel's performances this season numbered sixteen, and included two new oratorios—*Solomon*, performed twice, and *Susannah*, four times; besides *Hercules* twice, *Samson* four times, and *The Messiah* four times. The first time the last-mentioned work was performed this season was on March 23, 1749, and on this occasion it was first publicly announced by the name of *The Messiah*, instead of *A Sacred Oratorio*.

The 1749–50 season opened with a very similar company to that of the preceding year, though one or two minor players were seduced from their respective allegiance by the rival managers.

An accident occurred one evening during a performance of *Perseus and Andromeda*, one of Rich's pantomimes.* Perseus, bound to a large wheel, was being whirled with great velocity through the clouds to rescue Andromeda, when

* It was first produced in 1735, and became very popular.

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the wheel broke, and down came poor Perseus on to the stuffed dragon, which was in the act of seizing Andromeda. History omits to say with what result to Perseus, but Mr. Genest adds, "the curtain instantly dropt to hide the disgrace."

Delane, who had since 1735 been in the company of Covent Garden, died in April, 1750. He had been a friend and *protégé* of Garrick, but had offended him by recommending a new actress, Miss Ward, to Rich. The season also saw the last of Mrs. Christiana Horton, who had been before the public thirty-five years, of which fifteen were spent at Covent Garden under Rich. She was reputed to be a very beautiful woman, who retained her good looks well into middle age. In her later years she grew corpulent, and before her retirement she had become unfashionable and unacceptable to a public who had grown to like the easy, natural acting of the newer school of players.

Handel's twelve performances* in the spring of 1750 were—*Saul* twice; *Judas Macchabeus* three times; a new oratorio, *Theodora*, four times; *Samson* twice; and, on the last night of his season, April 11, for the seventh time at Covent Garden, *The Messiah*.

The new production, *Theodora*, seems to have

* Extract from the Egerton MSS. 2269, British Museum: "Mr. Handell paid £76 18s. 2d. for 12 oratorios."

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been admittedly a failure, although it contained many airs now counted among the classics, such as “Angels ever bright and fair.” Handel himself said, “The Jews will not come to it, because it is a Christian story, and the ladies because it is a virtuous one.”

The 1750–1 season opened at both theatres with a strong company of players. The competition of Covent Garden was held by many to presage disaster to Garrick, but, says Genest, the latter was a host in himself, and his troops were under much better discipline than those of Rich.

It is curious that on September 28, 1750, both the great theatres played *Romeo and Juliet* for no less than twelve consecutive nights. It was Garrick's first appearance as Romeo, and the following were the respective casts:—

Drury Lane.		Covent Garden.
Mr. Garrick	<i>Romeo</i>	Mr. Spranger Barry
„ Woodward	<i>Mercutio</i>	„ Macklin
„ Berry	<i>Capulet</i>	„ Sparks
„ Havard	<i>Friar Laurence</i>	„ Ridout
„ Scrace	<i>Paris</i>	„ Lacy
„ Blakes	<i>Tybalt</i>	„ Dyer
„ Mozeen	<i>Benvolio</i>	„ Gibson
„ Winstone	<i>Escalus</i>	
„ Vaughan	<i>Peter</i>	
„ W. Vaughan	<i>Gregory</i>	„ Arthur
„ Simpson	<i>Apothecary</i>	
„ James	<i>Sampson</i>	„ Collins
„ Marr	<i>Abram</i>	„ Dunstall
Miss Bellamy	<i>Juliet</i>	Mrs. Cibber
(first appearance at Drury Lane)		
Mrs. Bennet	<i>Lady Capulet</i>	„ Barrington
„ James	<i>Nurse</i>	„ Macklin

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The great galaxy of stars under Rich's banner were by no means a happy family. Quin and Barry disliked each other, as did the rival leading ladies, Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Woffington. They all despised Rich, and he returned their contempt. But they managed, nevertheless, to hang together for the six months' season. Quin stipulated for the enormous salary of £1000, and got it. Despite this, however, the impression prevailed at the time that Rich was badly treated by his company, and Quin amongst them. He, Barry, and Mrs. Cibber were constantly pleading indisposition and consequent inability to act. One evening Mrs. Woffington did the same, and the next evening she appeared she was greeted with a shower of orange-peel and many insults. The following is Genest's account of the incident :—

“She looked more beautiful than ever that night. Her anger gave a glow to her complexion and even added lustre to her charming eyes. She behaved with great resolution and treated their rudeness with glorious contempt. She left the stage and was called for, and with infinite persuasion was prevailed on to return.”

When she did, she walked forward and told them “she was there, ready and willing to perform her character, if they chose to permit

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her, that the decision was theirs, *on* or *off* just as they pleased ; it was a matter of indifference to her." Needless to add, the "ons" had it, and the performance was allowed to proceed.

Handel's season for this year, 1751, comprised, *Belshazzar*, performed three times ; *Alexander's Feast* and *Choice of Hercules* together four times, *Esther* once, and *Judas Macchabeus* twice. After which the theatres were closed, on the death of Frederick Prince of Wales. At this time the great composer's health had begun to fail somewhat, and the terrible affliction of blindness which had been long threatening him drew its dark form closer, so that he was forced to employ John Christopher Smith to help him at the organ.

In a note to the first chapter, mention was made of the opera *Alceste*, which, it will be remembered, was, according to Hawkins, composed by Handel in fulfilment of a debt he owed to John Rich after the series of disastrous seasons ending in 1737. M. Schoelcher, who goes to great pains in elucidating the probable facts, says that Smollett, then a young man of about twenty-five, wrote the libretto in 1746, and that the music Handel set to it was composed in 1749. This, unless Hawkins's account is purposely misleading, was some twelve years after the supposed debt must have been incurred, for it is certainly

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mentioned by Hawkins in connection with Handel's *first* seasons at Covent Garden, and not with those he recommenced in 1743. M. Schoelcher, in his anxiety to give Handel great credit for writing the music to pay off the debt, omits to notice that he did not do it until twelve years afterwards. However that may be, for some reason or other it certainly was never performed. Rich went to some expense over it, in the matter of scenery by Servandoni, etc., and if we may believe a memorandum note in a certain handbook of the oratorio *Hercules* belonging to "Mr. Ayrton," a collector, "song parts were added by T. M. [doubtless Thomas Morrell], and Rich only rejected it as being too good for his performers." At all events, upon Rich's refusal of the opera in its entirety Handel quite naturally used portions of it to add to his other works, including the *Choice of Hercules*, an "interlude," first produced in 1751, and the oratorio *Hercules* on its revival in 1749. To be quite frank about the matter, it is difficult to give much credence either to Hawkins's original story or to M. Schoelcher's elucidation. The whole affair is lost in the mists of obscurity that gather round transactions which took place a century and a half ago, and it does not seem probable that they will ever be dispelled.

This at least is certain. In the collection of

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Handel's works edited by Dr. Arnold, of whom we shall hear later, the opera is wrongly entitled *Alcides*, not *Alcestis*, and the copy from which it was printed was presented to Dr. Arnold by Colman the elder, who succeeded Beard, the son-in-law of Rich, in the management of Covent Garden Theatre.

1751-2 season opened without Peg Woffington, who had quarrelled with Rich and gone to Dublin. She had not been able to get over the insults and rioting which attended her first appearance as Lady Jane Grey, and which she attributed to Rich's instigation in order to caution her against being "ill" at inopportune moments; and, if her suspicion were well grounded, the imputation was indeed undeserved, for, as we have seen, she was always scrupulous in fulfilling engagements. Rich, however, denied the charge. Moreover, Dutton Cook, in "Hours with the Players," gives a different reason for Mrs. Woffington's secession from Covent Garden to that stated above. He says—

"She quitted Covent Garden in 1751 at the close of the season. She was offended at the names of Quin, Barry, and Mrs. Cibber being printed in letters of unusual size upon the play-bills which should have been devoted to the comedies in which she appeared."

Mrs. Cibber, however, still remained, as did

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the Macklins and Barry. On February 11, 1752, Rich revived his first triumph, the pantomime of *Harlequin Sorcerer*, which caused a tremendous rush for seats. The doors were opened at three o'clock in the afternoon to admit the crowds, greatly to the annoyance of Garrick, who was playing tragedy at Drury Lane.

1752-3 found the theatre still prospering. Barry and Mrs. Cibber, both in their prime, drew good houses in certain plays, notably in *Venice Preserved*, when Barry boldly challenged Garrick's supremacy as Jaffier. But at the end of the season Mrs. Cibber returned to Drury Lane, and so the two great players were never again seen together on the same stage.

From a letter, dated January 17, 1753, written by Foote to Sir John Delaval, it seems that *Harlequin Sorcerer* was again placed into the bill as the winter attraction—

“The theatres have each produced a Pantomime. That of Covent Garden is *The Sorcerer*, revived with a new piece of machinery that is elegantly design'd and happily executed; the subject is a Fountain. The genie of Drury Lane has some pretty contrivances, but the Inspector complains of its being barren of Incidents, defective in the plan, and improbable in the *dénouement*. . . . Francis' Tragedy called *Constantin* is to be

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acted at Covent Garden, and a Comedy call'd *The Gamester* is soon to be played at Drury Lane." *

Rich is said to have cleared £11,000 profit on the season. The most notable *débutant* was "Gentleman Smith," who made his first bow at Covent Garden under the friendly wing of Mrs. Cibber.

Writing from Pall Mall, April 5, 1753, Foote says to Mrs. Delaval—

"*The Englishman at Paris* has been better receiv^d than I expected.† Garrick, and all the Detrux of the Theatre say kinder things of it than modesty will permit me to repeat. . . . Miss Roach accompany'd by some frippery French woman occupy'd, to the no small scandal of the house, the Prince's Box, whilst the Duchess of Bedford, &c., &c., were oblig^d to take up with seats upon the stage."

No less than three members of the Macklin family were in the cast—Macklin himself, as Buck, the Englishman in Paris; Miss Macklin, as Lucinda; and Mrs. Macklin, as Mrs. Subtle. The object of the piece was "to expose the folly of sending our youth abroad to catch the vices and follies of our neighbour nation."

* *Vide* "Catalogue of the Wright Collection," Sotheby, 1899, p. 24.

† Foote's comedy of this name had been first performed at Covent Garden on March 24.

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1753-4 found Barry still acting for Rich, with Miss Bellamy, who reappeared in place of Mrs. Cibber, as the leading lady; but there is little of interest or worth special mention. "Ned" Shuter made a welcome reappearance, and, according to Walpole, a great sensation was caused by the playing of Signora Niccotina, or Nicolina, in an Italian burletta, wherein she gave such popularity to a part entitled "Spiletta" that the name stuck to her afterwards. Another successful *débutante* was Miss Nossiter, with whom Barry was said to be in love.

1754-5 happily saw the return of Mrs. Woffington to London and her old manager, Rich, whom she never again deserted, together with the reappearance of Sheridan, after ten years' absence. The two played together in a good selection of pieces, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Provoked Husband*, *Macbeth*, and an adaptation of Shakespear's *Coriolanus*, by Sheridan.

Barry, however, had left Rich and gone to Ireland. Moreover, he had the insufferable conceit to predict Rich's ruin by his secession. Mr. Genest's sage comment upon the prediction is, "he forgot that with the aid and novelty of new performers and Rich's never-failing support, Pantomime, it must be the manager's own fault

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if he be ruined by the loss of any performer whatever."

Arthur Murphy, afterwards celebrated as a dramatist, made his *début* as an actor with some success this season; and another novelty was imported by Rich in the person of M. Poitier, a famous French dancer (*vide* Waldron).

1755-6 was rendered memorable by rioting at Drury Lane. Barry returned with Miss Nossiter to Covent Garden, where Mrs. Woffington and Mrs.* Bellamy still remained. On November 13 "Gentleman Smith" made a successful reappearance there in *The Recruiting Officer*, in which Peg Woffington "ravished," as old Genest says, both in the male and female dress in the part of Sylvia.

The tragedy of *The Rival Queens*, revived on January 15, 1756, was responsible for an outbreak of jealousy on the part of Mrs. Woffington, and directed towards Mrs. Bellamy. It is amusing enough that her smouldering feelings were brought to a head by her rival's appearance in this play in a beautiful Parisian dress. To such an extent did she let her feelings overcome her that she one night "fairly drove Statira off the stage and stabbed † her behind the scenes."

* Georgiana Bellamy was announced as "Mrs. Bellamy" after her confinement, which occurred in the spring of 1754.

† The "stabbing," it should be said, was part of the action of the play.

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The season must have been a successful one, if we may judge from the company. It ended up on the usual date, May 25, with the *Constant Couple* and Peg Woffington dancing a minuet in the character of Sir Harry Wildair. A new piece, not mentioned by Genest, was *The Miser*, produced on May 6, with a "ballad farce" by Henry Carey, entitled *The Pressgang*.

1756-7 found the same company still performing at Covent Garden. On March 14, 1757, there was produced there the celebrated tragedy of *Douglas*, by the Rev. John Home.

The history of its production merits something more than a passing notice. Home was the young Presbyterian minister at the town of Athelstonford, in Haddingtonshire. As may be imagined, the playwriting tendency of the young minister found little favour with his spiritual superiors, or, indeed, his friends, most of whom had been taught from infancy to look upon the theatre and all its ways as infamous. The play was performed in Edinburgh with great success, to the horror and wrath of the Presbytery of Scotland. Indeed, matters were rendered so uncomfortable for the daring playwright that he resigned his living and came to London with his tragedy. It was then offered to Garrick, who thought fit to decline it; but it was eagerly snapped up by the astute Rich, now getting an

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old man, but quite as keen a judge of a good play as the youngest of his rivals. Towards the end of the season it was produced with immense success. The character of Norval was taken by Barry, and that of Lady Randolph by Mrs. Woffington. The former was justly criticised for dressing the part of a simple shepherd in a rich white satin suit; nor was the lovely Peg Woffington well suited in the heavily tragic character allotted to her. Her *forte*, doubtless, lay in light comedy parts, and especially when, as in Sir Harry Wildair, she was dressed in the highly becoming costume of a young man of fashion.

On March 18 * this year there first appeared, in the play of *Lethe*, young Tate Wilkinson, to whose “Memoirs” the theatrical historian of the eighteenth century is so much indebted. Wilkinson’s own account of his second appearance as The Fine Gentleman in Garrick’s piece is too good to be lost.

“No sooner,” he says, “had I made my *entrée* than an involuntary fit of laughter seized the whole house from below to above, for such a contrast to the name or idea of a Fine Gentleman sure never was till then beheld; the preposterous figure was heightened in absurdity by Woodward’s appearing every week [at Drury

* Wilkinson himself gives the date as the 28th.

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Lane] in that character with infinite credit. His acting was assisted by every elegance that whim, dress, fancy, judgment and fashion could bestow, whilst poor Pilgarrick chose to finish the curious appearance by quitting Woodward's manner entirely, and spoke in my own voice, which is naturally deep, so that my tones were drowned with the excessive laughter; and when I made my exit, whether the peals of mirth or the universal hisses were the strongest seemed difficult to distinguish!"

Poor Wilkinson, whose mother was entirely dependent on her son's exertions, then had to undergo the ordeal of asking Rich to excuse his failure and give him some employment in any capacity. The manager's reply was typical of the man. "No," he said; "you are unfit for the stage, Muster Whittington, and I won't larn you; you may go, Muster Whittington." "And then," adds Wilkinson, "he stroked his favourite cat!"

The tragedy of *Douglas* was, alas! almost the final great play to be associated with the name of the inimitable Peg Woffington.

On May 3, 1757,* or, if we prefer to believe the date given by Tate Wilkinson in his "Memoirs," on May 17, she appeared on the stage for the last time as Rosalind in *As You Like It*. She

* The date given by Genest.

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was then only in her thirty-sixth year (Genest says forty-fourth), and up to the previous season her health does not appear to have caused her any anxiety. Lately, however, she had complained of illness ; but even then she refused to give way, and bravely continued her profession of delighting the world of fashion and pleasure when her spirits and beauty were visibly passing from her. On the sad last night she had, it appeared, suffered from and complained of pain and illness several times during the play, but insisted on trying to go on to repeat the famous and delightful epilogue spoken by Rosalind. She is said to have got as far as the words, "If I were among you I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me," when her voice broke and she faltered, tried to go on but failed, and tottered with a faint cry to the stage door, where she was caught, to the horror and amazement of the audience at seeing their popular favourite stricken before their very eyes. She did not, however, immediately expire, but lingered on sadly enough, a shadow of her former self, till 1760, at Teddington, having before her death—which took place at her residence in Vincent Square, Westminster—continued her career of benevolence there by endowing some almshouses for the poor of the neighbourhood. With her there passed away, perhaps, the most



PEG WOFFINGTON.

From the Painting by A. Pond, engraved by J. MacArdell.

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fascinating figure in the history of the British drama. Although of humble origin, not only was she a singularly accomplished and versatile actress, who won the hearts of men and even women in her profession, but she was, besides, witty and brilliant in her private life. It would not have been a matter for surprise if such a woman, petted and run after by all as she was, adored by men, flattered by women, courted by every one, had become spoilt and capricious, but she did not. She had—what was doubtless a powerful addition to her physical charms—a tender heart that never failed to be touched by an appeal for her sympathy and assistance. Hitchcock says of her—

“To her honour, be it ever remembered that while in the zenith of her glory, courted and caressed by all ranks and degrees, she made no alteration in her behaviour. She remained the same gay, affable, obliging, good-natured Woffington to every one around her. Not the lowest performer in the theatre did she refuse playing for. Out of twenty-six benefits she acted in twenty-four.”

Her reliability was another factor in her character which deservedly added to her popularity with managers and public alike. She never permitted her love of pleasure to interfere

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with her duty to the public, and one of her contemporaries, Victor, says of her—

“Tho’ she seldom acted less than four times a week, she never disappointed one audience in three winters either by real or affected illness; and yet I have often seen her on the stage when she ought to have been in her bed.”

As we have seen in a previous chapter, and as all students of dramatic history know, this beautiful woman had her faults; but we may well believe that the Recording Angel will find it easy to blot out these in registering for all eternity the numberless instances shown in her brief career of that “most precious gift of charity” in which she proved herself so rich.

The season of 1757–8 was not distinguished in any special way;* but earlier (Friday, February 10, 1757) in the year, during Handel’s season at Covent Garden, he had actually brought out what was virtually a new work, the *Triumph of Time and Truth*, an augmented translation of an oratorio written nearly fifty years before to Italian words. The new additions were no light matter, comprising, as they did, nine entirely new pieces.

1758–9 was rendered noticeable by the

* Except by the bad “business” done. Rich had to give away “box-tickets by dozens” (Tate Wilkinson).

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revival of *Cymbeline*, the cast including Smith, Ryan, Lowe, and Mrs. Vincent as Imogen, in place of Mrs. Bellamy, who declined the part. A decidedly important event took place on December 2, when Dodsley's tragedy of *Cleone* was produced, after being rejected by Garrick, with Mrs. Bellamy in the title rôle. This fine actress scored a great success, perhaps to her own surprise, since, from the account given in her "Memoirs," her acting at rehearsals seemed to foreshadow failure. It is worth remembering that she discarded the hoop in her costume—an innovation which must have required immense courage on the part of the actress.*

The infirmities of age (he was now seventy-four) did not prevent Handel from continuing his performances, although he well knew that the dread call was not to be long delayed. His health began to decline seriously at the commencement of 1759, but his courage and immense will-power were superior to the infirmities of fast-approaching death. He had been blind already several years, in spite of which he constantly officiated at the organ after directing his oratorios. The *Public Advertiser* of February 24, 1759, duly announced the opening of the last season, to be directed by the

* *Vide* "Bellamy's Life," vol. i. Letter lxiv.

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master. The oratorios to be performed were, for March 2, "*Solomon*, with new additions and alterations;" and "*Susannah*, with new additions and alterations," for March 9. On the 14th, 16th, and 21st *Samson* was performed; on the 23rd and 28th *Judas Macchabeus*; and on March 30, April 4 and 6, *The Messiah*." The *Public Advertiser* of April 5, 1759, announced—

"At the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden to-morrow, Friday, the 6th of April, will be presented a Sacred Oratorio, called *The Messiah*, being the last time of performing it this season. To begin a half an hour after six."

On the Friday morning itself this advertisement was repeated, "This Evening, *The Messiah*." And so, on April 6, 1759, after the close of the performance of his immortal work at Covent Garden Theatre, this truly great man quietly went home to his house in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, and went to bed never to rise again. On that day week, Good Friday, before midnight, he died, at the age of seventy-four years.

It is pleasant to record that he had long outlived the jealousies and rivalries of twenty years before. The nobility, or at least those members of it who had shown themselves hostile, "had the courage and the good taste to confess

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themselves vanquished by his genius." The public, says Mr. Schoelcher, had become more and more attracted to the performances of the great master. *Samson*, *Judas*, and *The Messiah* never failed to draw a compact crowd, and after paying all his debts, to his great joy, he left behind him a fortune of £20,000. He had not paid his debts until 1750, therefore the seasons from 1750 to 1759 must have been very profitable to enable him to amass his fortune. Burney says, "One of my friends who was generally at the performance of each oratorio that year (1759) and who used to visit him after it was over in the treasurer of the theatre's office, says that the money he used to take to his carriage of a night, though in gold and silver, was as likely to weigh him down, and throw into a fever, as the copper money of the painter Correggio, if he had as far to carry it."

In a codicil to his will dated August 4, 1757, Handel says: "I give to John Rich, Esquire, my great organ that stands at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden."

This codicil is witnessed by Thomas Harris and John Maxwell, and in a further codicil, dated only two days previous to his death, he left "Thos. Harris, Esquire, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, the sum of £300."

The season of 1759-60 brought a valuable

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recruit to the Drury Lane company in the person of Mrs. Abington, who first appears on the bills as Miss Barton. Garrick now had a fine selection of actors and actresses at his disposal, including Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Clive, King Yates, Miss Macklin, and Mrs. Pritchard. Yet the season is said to have been the worst one at Drury Lane on record. Against this brilliant company Rich could only bring forward Smith, Mrs. Hamilton, Beard, and some young *débutantes* of his own training, notable among them being Miss Brent, who played Polly Peachum with immense success. Ryan, who had played the lover and hero in Covent Garden plays for many years, died in August, 1760, and his absence most of the season created a serious gap in the company.

The reappearance of Beard at Covent Garden synchronizes with his marriage this year to the daughter of John Rich. He had not played there for a good many years.* During that time (1748-59) he had been at Drury Lane. It will be remembered by my readers that he had particularly distinguished himself in 1743 when he created the title *rôle* of Samson for Handel. During this season he played Captain Macheath in the revival of *The Beggar's Opera* for thirty-seven nights in succession, with the exception of

* Genest says twelve.



JOHN BEARD.

From a Painting in the possession of Mrs. Benson (artist unknown).

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one night, March 10, on which a feeble farce, partly written by Rich himself, entitled *The Spirit of Contradiction*, was played for the first and last time.

Garrick's discomfiture at the astonishing success of the revival is satirized in the following lines upon Nancy Dawson, one of the actresses in the cast, and the mistress of Ned Shuter, the popular comedian :—

“Of all the girls in our town,
The black, the fair, the red, the brown,
Who dance and prance it up and down,
There's none like Nancy Dawson !
Her easy mien, her step so neat,
She foots, she trips, she looks so sweet,
Her every motion is complete,
I die for Nancy Dawson.

“ See how she comes to give surprise,
With joy and pleasure in her eyes ;
To give delight she always tries,
So means my Nancy Dawson !
Was there no task t' obstruct the way,
No Shuter droll, nor house so gay,
A bet of fifty pounds I'll lay
That I gain Nancy Dawson.

“ See how the op'ra takes a run,
Exceeding *Hamlet*, *Lear*, or *Lun*,
Tho' in it there would be no fun,
Was't not for Nancy Dawson.
Tho' Beard and Brent charm every night,
And female Peachum's justly right,
And Filch and Lockit please the sight,
'Tis crowned by Nancy Dawson.

“ See little Davy strut and puff,
'P—— on the op'ra and such stuff,
My house is never full enough,
A curse on Nancy Dawson !’

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Tho' Garrick he has had his day,
And forc'd the town his laws t' obey,
Now Johnny Rich is come in play,
With help of Nancy Dawson."

The fair but frail Nancy did not long survive to enjoy her theatrical triumphs. She is said to have been twenty-nine years of age at the time of her success as a hornpipe dancer in *The Beggar's Opera*. In September, 1760, she migrated to Drury Lane, and was engaged there and elsewhere as Columbine. She seems to have retired from her profession in 1763, and to have died in 1767.

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CHAPTER V

1760-1767

WE now approach the day when the long connection of Covent Garden Theatre with its creator and wonderfully successful manager was to be severed by the inexorable hand of death. But no trace of failing power or loss of energy yet appeared, nor was there any hint of resignation. It has been asserted that, having parted with his interest in the theatre in the year 1759, he then retired and left the management in the hands of his two sons-in-law, Beard, the singer, and the actor Wilford, and others, but I can obtain no confirmation of this. Dibdin, who certainly knew the facts, says nothing about it, and Mr. Genest, whose encyclopædic work might be expected to refer to such an important matter, does not mention it. Indeed, at the end of his account of the 1760-1 season, he retails an anecdote of Rich, taken from Wilkinson's "Memoirs," which seems to tacitly point to the fact that he was then still actively engaged in

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managing the theatre. The story is one told of an interview between the old manager and Tate Wilkinson. The latter asserts that Rich wanted to engage him for the succeeding season, and was offended because he would only accept an engagement for ten weeks. Upon parting, however, Rich put a present of five guineas into his hand for his benefit, one of "many friendly good-tempered things" that he did, says Mr. Genest, in an unusual burst of enthusiasm.

It is curious how persistently Mr. Genest only grudgingly admits Rich's good qualities as a man and a manager. There is little doubt that he deserves to rank among the great theatre managers of all time. He doubtless had the faults common to his day, and to these was added, as we know, his unfortunate lack of a good education and many harmless eccentricities. But he did what few of his successors have done since, he bore the responsibility of successfully managing the great theatre on his own shoulders for nearly thirty years. It is said that he occasionally took counsel from certain members of his company, Ridout and others, but the real manager was certainly always Rich. He did it, too, for the greater part of the time in competition with the man since universally acclaimed as the greatest British actor of his own or any other time, David Garrick, who was

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at the head of a fine theatre, and often supported by a brilliant company of players. Yet Rich always held his own, and often more than held it. He had won the esteem, we may assume, of Handel (himself a man unlikely to be attracted by unworthiness), for he bequeathed his organ to him. More than one of the dramatists of his day wrote grateful dedications to him when publishing their plays.

His last twelve months' management of his theatre opened on September 22, 1760. He had lost the services of Ryan, a useful actor, who had been with him since 1718, and who died August 15, 1760. His company consisted of Durstall, Mrs. Green, Clarke, Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Barrington, and Sparks. To these were added two notable recruits in the person of Miss Macklin, who reappeared on the scene of her early successes after an absence of seven years, and Tate Wilkinson, who made his appearance in *The Minor*, in fulfilment of the ten weeks' contract he had entered into. Wilkinson's *début* was preceded by a squabble with his old enemy Foote, who had never forgiven him for mimicking him two years before at Drury Lane. Foote frightened Rich with a threat that if he persisted in giving Wilkinson a part he would caricature him and his three favourite cats; but the old man eventually took his courage in both

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hands, and actually allowed young Wilkinson to repeat his audacious burlesque of the elder actor. Nor does there appear to have been any attempt at revenge on the part of Foote, who as an accomplished mimic himself should have certainly been less thin-skinned.

In the Additional MS. [12201, fo. 30] at the British Museum there is a record of the last of those shadowy mortgage transactions with Susannah White, the reason for which the writer confesses is absolutely beyond him. At the time it was executed (March 25, 1760), Rich must have been a wealthy man, seeing that on his death one year later his property in the theatre was valued at £60,000. On this occasion the sum of £1800 was raised. Again the lease granted by the Duke of Bedford was assigned as security, and two other leases also, of premises of which there is a description given.

The death of George II. caused a general closing of the theatres from October 25 till November 18, when *Henry V.* and, shortly after, *Douglas* were revived.

On November 28 one of Arne's after-pieces, or, as we should probably call it to-day, comic operettas, *Thomas and Sally*, was produced to a libretto by Bickerstaff. The plot was of the usual eighteenth-century type, and hinged upon the attempts of a wicked squire to seduce Sally,

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the heroine, who is rescued by Thomas, the hero. The parts were taken by Miss Brent, who made an enormous success this season by her singing and acting ; Mattocks, who enacted the squire ; and Mrs. Vernon, whom even Mr. Genest admits to have been “ a good singing actress,” having a naturally good voice, humour, and expression, and added to these taste and good judgment.

Greatly to Mr. Genest's indignation, Rich adapted a part of the *Winter's Tale* as an opera, and called it *Florizel and Perdita*, “to suit the prevailing taste at this theatre,” says poor Mr. Genest

On April 7 good Mr. Rich gives a benefit for Ryan's widow. On the 10th the *début* of Miss Hallam * as a woman was made as Juliet, she having hitherto taken boys' parts only.

Following Handel's death, the Lenten oratorio season was now directed by John Christopher Smith, his executor, and John Stanley, the famous blind organist and composer. For the first season the latter composed his oratorio of *Zimri*.

The career of John Stanley, the blind organist, is so well known, says the *Musical Times* (March 1, 1905), that there is no need to give detailed particulars, except to mention that he was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, organists of his day. He held the organistship of St. Andrew's, Holborn, for sixty years, and

* Afterwards Mrs. Mattocks.

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for fifty-two years of that time he was also organist of the Temple Church, where Handel and some fifty other organists are said to have assembled in order to hear him play. He became Master of the King's Music in succession to Dr. Boyce, and led the band himself. He was, in spite of his blindness, a good player at skittles, shovel-board, billiards, and whist, for which he used perforated cards. He died in Hatton Garden on May 19, 1786.

The autumn season of 1761 opened with *The Beggar's Opera*, but the final and characteristic triumph of the veteran manager was his representation of *The Procession from the Abbey at the Coronation*, to celebrate the rejoicings at this time over the crowning of George III.

It was first given, in conjunction with Henry V., on November 13, and proved an immense success, notwithstanding Garrick's miserably shabby attempt at a similar affair at Drury Lane, which was entirely eclipsed by the Covent Garden production.

From Letter 75 of the Bellamy Memoirs we learn that—

“in order to prevent the principal performers from refusing to appear in the procession, he [Rich] proposed walking in it himself as Queen's Chamberlain. Unfortunately, however, he was taken ill at the last rehearsal, and never had the



JONATHAN BATTISHILL, APPOINTED CONDUCTOR OF THE BAND
AT COVENT GARDEN ABOUT 1760, AGED 22.

From the Miniature by L. Sullivan in 1765, engraved by S. Harding.

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pleasure of seeing the grand pageant* he had spared no expense to render as magnificent as possible."

So it is evident from Miss Bellamy's testimony that the old manager was game to the last, and it is to be hoped that at least he had the satisfaction of hearing of the success which had attended his last production.

Rich died of an attack of the stone at his house in Covent Garden on the 26th of the same month, having nearly attained the age of seventy years.

Genest denies him "the talents adequate to the proper management of a theatre," and he looks upon his chief title to honour in the fact that not till a little before his death was Covent Garden turned into an opera house.

Dibdin tells us that he left a share in the theatre to his wife's brother, Wilford (the father of Mrs. Bulkeley), and others, enjoining by his will that the property should be sold for the benefit of his heirs, whenever a purchaser or purchasers could be found who would give for it £60,000.† At that time the ground rent was £300 per annum, and there is no doubt that it

* *Vide* Davies's "Life of Garrick," vol. i. p. 328.

† In the copy of the will at Somerset House no sum is mentioned, the onus of fixing the value of the property being left to his wife and her advisers.

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was mainly owing to Rich's business methods, influence, and exertions, added to his strict integrity, that the theatre had achieved a position second to none other in the metropolis.

Holding a position of considerable influence, as he did during the whole of a long life, at a period when manners were rough, and the law of libel was yet unknown, it is pleasant to find among the lampoons and caricatures of him which remain to this day scarcely any which can be described as being based upon accusations, or, still less, proofs of dishonourable actions. Tate Wilkinson, writing of his old master thirty years afterwards, could find little but good to say of him.

Commenting on his death, Davies says—

“A man's true character is always best known near home. At Uxbridge Mr. Rich was esteemed an obliging neighbour, a hospitable country gentleman, and a very kind landlord. He took great delight in promoting and celebrating, at his own expense, the weddings of his young tenants, and making the new-married pairs happy. I am well assured that the great consolation of this gentleman in his dying moments proceeded from the recollection of his many charitable actions, which he indeed had forgotten, till his friends, by bestowing their commendations on him for this most amiable Christian virtue, brought them to his mind.”

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Rich's country seat was at Cowley Grove, Hillingdon, near Uxbridge. It had been the residence of Barton Booth, the great tragedian, who was dying when Rich opened Covent Garden theatre thirty-three years before. It was in Hillingdon churchyard that the remains of John Rich were buried. The tomb bears the following inscription :—

“ Sacred to the memory of John Rich, Esq., who died Nov. 26th, 1761, aged 69 years. In him were united the various virtues that could endear him to his family, friends and acquaintance. Distress never failed to find relief in his bounty ; unfortunate merit, a refuge in his generosity. Here likewise are interred Amy, his second wife, with their two young children John and Elizabeth, who both died in their infancy.”

Surmounting this inscription are the armorial bearings assigned to Rich, impaling those of his third wife, Priscilla, sister of Edward Wilford, Esq., who survived him, viz. :

First coat, a chevron . . . between two lions passant. Second coat, three leopards' heads. . . . Crest out of a ducal coronet . . . a demi-lion rampant.

Shortly after Rich's death the famous pantomime of *Harlequin's Invasion* was revived by Garrick at the Lane, in which the great actor took the opportunity to pay a graceful tribute

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to the memory of his old manager and long-established rival.

He wrote a prologue, apologizing for the introduction of a speaking Harlequin.

“’Tis wrong,
The wits will say, to give the fool a tongue.
When Lun appeared with matchless art and whim,
He gave the pow’r of speech to every limb,
Tho’ mask’d and mute, convey’d his quick intent,
And told in frolic gestures all he meant ;
But now the motley coat and sword of wood
Require a tongue to make them understood.”

Another eulogium on the dead manager appears in the *Annual Register* for 1761. It is anonymous, but the sentiments it expresses are no less praiseworthy than those of David Garrick.

ON THE DEATH OF JOHN RICH, ESQ.

“ *Accept this latest tribute at my hand.*”

The scene is closed. Life’s play is done,
And pleasantry expires with Lun,
Who well perform’d with various art
The mimic and the moral part.
His action just, correct his plan,
Whether as Harlequin, or man.
Hear, critics, hear, ! and spare your jest,
Life’s but a motley garb at best ;
He wore it long with grace and ease,
And ev’ry gesture taught to please.
Where (some few patchwork foibles seen
Scattered around—blue—yellow—green)
His constant virtue’s radiant hue
O’er all superior shone to view,
The lively vision of repartee
As magic swords was smart and free,
Like that, for harmless mirth design’d,
It struck, but left no pain behind.

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The masque of oddity he wore
Endeared the hidden beauties more.
When thrown aside, the shade was clear'd,
The real countenance appear'd,
Where human kindness, candour fair,
And truth, the native features were.
How few like him could change with ease
From shape to shape and all should please !
Think on the num'rous hours of sport
We spent with him in Fancy's Court !
What ev'nings of supreme delight !
They're past, they're clos'd in endless night.
—For gratitude for virtue's cause
Crown his last exit with applause.
Let him not want the lasting praise
(That noble meed of well-spent days),
While this, his mortal dress laid by
With ready grace and decency.
Now changing on a nobler plan
To blissful saint from worthy man,
He makes on yon celestial shore
One easy transformation more.

With his many eccentricities and foibles, it is somewhat curious that the character of good old manager Rich has not been made to do duty in any modern romantic drama of the David Garrick type, in which it is evident he would make a capital study for an actor such as Mr. Cyril Maude. There was, however, produced at the Lyric in July, 1894, a little "curtain raiser" in which the principal personage is an actress in his company who is dancing in *Terpsichore*, produced, as readers of this book may remember, on November 9, 1734. The following account of the playlet is taken from the *Era* newspaper:—

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“A new one-act play, by Justin Huntly M'Carthy, entitled

‘TERPSICHORE.’

Margaret	Miss Aïda Jenoure.
Barbara ...	...	Miss Marianne Caldwell.
Lord Mohun ...	...	Mr. A. H. Revelle.
Master Oldacre ...	...	Mr. Rudge Harding.

Margaret, a dancer belonging to Manager Rich's company, recounts to Barbara, her waiting-maid, at the opening of the play an adventure that she has had on the previous evening. Then Lord Mohun, a libertine, who had before pestered her with his unwelcome and dishonourable attentions, boldly attempted to carry her off as she was leaving the stage door. Fortunately she found a stout and able defender in a young gentleman named Oldacre—a silent adorer of hers, who watches her from the pit nightly—who extricated her from a very awkward position, and, having done so, disappeared before the terrified girl could find words to thank him. She soon has an opportunity to make up for her involuntary neglect. He calls with a much-valued ring that she had lost, and being mistaken for an agent who is negotiating with the dancer to open in Vienna, is admitted. After a little game of cross purposes, Margaret again puts the ring on her finger. How can she reward him? He wishes for nothing; but if not asking too much, would she just dance to him the new measure that she will introduce in a new production, called

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Terpsichore, that Manager Rich is soon to put on at Covent Garden. Margaret consents, and to the accompaniment of Oldacre at the harpsichord she rehearses her new dance. She is just about to repeat a portion of it when Lord Mohun forces his way in. The men quarrel, and a duel is threatened. Margaret engages to settle the dispute between them, and for that purpose retires. Lord Mohun then receives a note from her that he is to follow her to Vienna. Oldacre, not understanding the ruse of his innamorata, is in despair, but Margaret, now knowing Oldacre to be her unknown champion, touches him gently on the shoulder, there is an access of tenderness in her manner, and as she offers him her hand with the words, 'Let us hope, sir, that we may become better acquainted,' the curtain falls."

The management of the great theatre was entrusted by Rich's executors to Beard and Bencraft, two of his company, for the remainder of the 1761-2 season. Both of these gentlemen were interested in the property through their respective wives, who were daughters of the late proprietor. Beard, as we know, had, only two years before, married Charlotte, one of Rich's daughters.

The principal event of the later part of the season took place on February 2, 1762, when Covent Garden was the scene of a great musical event. This was the first performance of Dr.

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Arne's *Artaxerxes*, the words translated by Arne himself from Metastasio's *Artaserse*, which Busby calls an "Anglo-Italian opera." The principal characters were taken by Miss Brent, who was a pupil of Arne, Beard himself, Tenducci and Peretti, two Italian singers, Mattocks the actor, and Mrs. Vernon. According to Genest, it was performed "about nine times." Busby assures us "the piece was ardently applauded, ran a great number of nights, and when ably performed is still and ever will be listened to with rapture." According to Grove, "the part of Mandane was long considered the touchstone of the powers of a soprano singer." Arne sold the copyright for sixty guineas.

At the end of the season one of the old company, Mrs. Hamilton, an actress of some merit, fell out with the new manager. She had been something of a favourite with Rich, who was delighted by her habit of seldom or never wearing powdered hair, and she so far presumed on her supposed importance as to decline a part allotted her by Beard. He threatened to fine her £20. She thereupon foolishly told him that there was a secret clause in her agreement with Rich empowering her to break the agreement with any future management. The admission had precisely the contrary effect to that she expected. The new manager took her at her

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word, and she left the theatre, never afterwards to have a first-class engagement.

The 1762-3 season found Woodward back at his former theatre, under the banner of his old friend Beard. On October 8 Dalton's alteration of Milton's *Comus* was played, in which the beautiful Anne Catley, then barely eighteen years old, first appeared as The Pastoral Nymph. She was the daughter of very humble parents, her father being a hackney coachman and her mother a washerwoman, living near Tower Hill. She had been in the habit of singing as a child in the streets and neighbourhood of the Tower, and her father had her apprenticed to William Bates for proper instruction. When she first appeared in public at Vauxhall Gardens, in 1762, her great personal beauty and fascination soon brought her into fame, and after some romantic adventures with a young baronet, who tried to obtain control of her, she became a pupil of Macklin, and was long famous as an operatic actress, until she retired in 1784, universally honoured and respected.

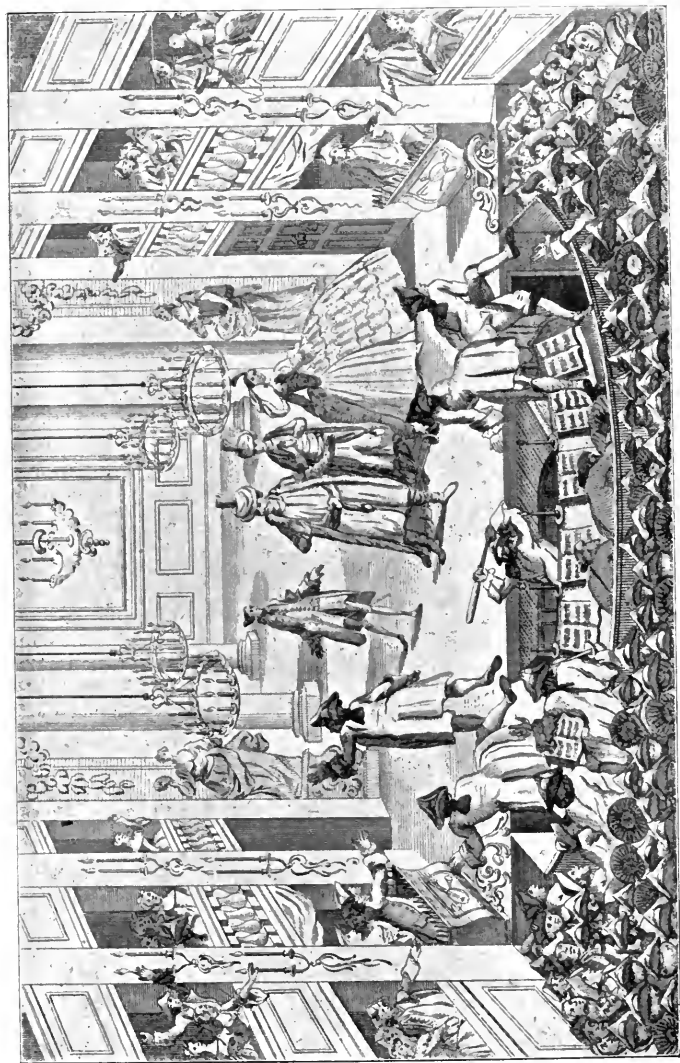
A notable revival of *Every Man in his Humour* took place on October 25, 1762, but want of space will not permit of a detailed description, and we must pass to the new year, 1763, after recording that Bickerstaff and Arne's opera of *Love in a Village* was first

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produced this season by Beard, with himself in the principal part, on December 8, 1762.

Arne's opera of *Artaxerxes* had been advertised for February 24, 1763, and the usual announcement was made on the bills that "nothing under full price would be taken." This attracted the attention of the notorious rioter, Fitzpatrick, described by Cook as "a gentleman of independent fortune and a critic of some note in his time," who had forced Garrick—by several nights' extraordinary and disgraceful rioting, the account of which it is impossible to read even to-day without indignation—to admit the public at the end of the third act at half price. This ruffian's malice was principally levelled at Garrick, yet as he professed to be engaged in a public cause he thought it would appear inconsistent not to compel Beard to submit to the conditions he had forced on Garrick. Accordingly he repeated his abominable tactics at Covent Garden, doing great damage to the theatre. Mr. Dibdin's account is as follows:—

"Mr. Beard defended his refusal of taking half price, from the custom on such occasions, and delated upon the enormous expenses incurred by managers, particularly upon the splendid manner in which the pieces were got up at Covent Garden—but in vain: he was told that, as Garrick had



RIOT AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE DURING THE PLAYING OF "ARTAXERXES," 1763.

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submitted, it showed an overweening confidence in him to resist ; and the demand was whether he would, or would not, comply with their regulation of the prices, ‘ Yes or no ? ’ Beard boldly answered ‘ No. ’ The benches, chandeliers, etc., were immediately demolished ; and as much injury done as took four or five days to repair. Beard obtained a Lord Chief Justice’s warrant and summoned Fitzpatrick and one or two others before Lord Mansfield ; who told Fitzpatrick that ‘ if a life had been lost he should have answered for it with his own. ’ No more attempts were, in consequence, made at demolishing the theatre, but the rioters changed their tactics and night after night so annoyed the performers and disturbed the performance with cat-calls, etc., that Beard was obliged to give up the contest. The remainder of the season was uneventful.”

The 1763–4 season is principally noticeable for the production, on May 21, 1764, of the *Shepherd’s Artifice*, an opera written and composed by Charles Dibdin, then a youth seventeen years old. Genest dismisses it curtly as “ a contemptible Pastoral in two acts. ” Dibdin himself, twenty-six years later, said of it—

“ It has a thousand faults, and in particular, as at that time I did not know how to put my musical thoughts upon paper . . . it is impossible to describe the number of its inaccuracies. The piece was only got up for my own benefit.”

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It was performed twice, and each time brought a tolerable house, but “it never came forward in the common business of the theatre. The music was very much applauded.” *

Dibdin himself took the part of Strephon to the Sylvia of Miss Hallam.

The 1764–5 season found a very similar company of players to those in the preceding seasons. Miss Macklin was playing Juliet and other leading heroines, Miss Hallam occasionally taking her place, while Shuter, Woodward, Smith, Mrs. Bellamy, and Mattocks filled other prominent places. On December 12 a now forgotten opera, with words and music by Arne, entitled *The Guardian Outwitted*, was produced.

On January 10, 1765, Bencraft, one of the two managers, who had married Henrietta Rich, died.

On January 31 there was produced the first opera written by the theatre’s new musical composer and director, Samuel Arnold. It was entitled *The Maid of the Mill*, and enjoyed a run of twenty-nine nights. The whole dramatic and musical force of the theatre were engaged—Mattocks, Shuter, Beard himself, Miss Brent, daughter of a famous fencing master, and afterwards Mrs. Pinto, and last, but not least, young Dibdin, who, in the character of Ralph (which had been refused by every other comedian and

* *The Harmonicon*, 1824.



JAMES BENCRAFT.

From a Painting in the possession of His Honour Judge Wood.

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offered to Dibdin as a last resort), is said to have displayed much originality of conception. This opera was one of the first, since the time of Purcell, in which concerted music was used to carry on the business of the stage (Grove). The composer of the opera had himself reached the mature age of twenty-three years in the previous August. He had belonged to the "Children of the Chapel Royal, and had been trained by Gates, who held the office of Master."

Arnold afterwards informed Dr. Busby, who records the fact in his "History of Music" (vol. ii. p. 468), that "for the composition, or rather compilation of the music of this opera he consented to accept of the managers only the sum of £12 rather than resign the opportunity of bringing his talents * before the public." The libretto was by Bickerstaff.

On April 23 a niece of John Rich, Miss Wilford, afterwards Mrs. Bulkeley, made her first appearance as an actress as Miranda in *The Busybody*. She had previously been known as a dancer.

On May 2, 1765, a new opera by Thomas Hull, one of the Covent Garden company, entitled *The Spanish Lady*, was performed for the first time.

* In 1793 Arnold was appointed organist of Westminster Abbey, a post he enjoyed for nine years, dying in 1802.

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The beginnings were made this season of an institution that has since afforded relief and comfort to many hundreds of members of the dramatic profession, who often, from no fault of their own, are reduced to penury. This was provided by means of a benefit for a Theatrical Fund given at Covent Garden.

The idea is said to have originated with Thomas Hull, but it certainly received a powerful stimulus by the favour shown to the scheme by Beard and Mrs. Rich. For many years to come the pages of Genest record frequent benefits for the Theatrical Fund, and in the year 1776 it received a Royal Charter of Incorporation.*

Israel in Egypt † was performed for the first time at Covent Garden this season, under the direction of John Stanley and J. C. Smith, who had taken charge of the oratorios after Handel's death.

The lighting of the stage was immensely improved in 1765 by Garrick, who introduced a method at Drury Lane which he had seen on his recent visit to the Continent, viz. illumination by means of lights screened from the audience. Malone says that previous to this light was provided by means of small circular wooden frames furnished with candles, four of which were hung on either side of the stage. Tate

* See p. 208.

† First performed at the King's Theatre April 4, 1739.

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Wilkinson's "Memoirs" speak of six chandeliers suspended over the stage, each containing twelve candles in brass sockets, so it is pretty evident that the new device was a long step in advance.

Mr. W. J. Lawrence, a searcher after historical accuracy in these matters, points out that many years before this footlights had been used in the London theatres. In the MS. list of properties at Covent Garden Theatre in 1743,* there is included "the lamps in front, fixt with barrel, cordage, weights, etc.," which evidently refers to a primitive form of footlights. There are, moreover, early prints in existence showing footlights screened from the audience.

It is, however, likely that both accounts of the matter are right, as it is possible that the footlights introduced previously had not been extensively adopted by other theatres, and for modern confirmation of this the playgoer may be reminded that a considerable time elapsed between the adoption of the electric lighting at the Savoy and its universal adoption by other theatres. Oil lamps were first used in Paris in 1784, at the Odéon, and it was there, too, that gas made its *début* in a Paris theatre in 1822.

1765-6 found the same company acting, and produced two new pieces, one an opera entitled

* See Appendix.

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The Summer's Tale, of which Cumberland (afterwards well known as a dramatist) wrote the libretto, and another entitled *The Double Mistake*. Cumberland is recorded to have set a good example by contributing £74, the profits of the ninth performance of his new piece, for the Theatrical Fund, and it was further augmented by a benefit on May 13, 1766, in which Mrs. Bellamy, Mrs. Ward, Miss Macklin, Smith, Hull, and many others took part in a revival of *The Albion Queens*, followed by a pantomime entitled *Perseus and Andromeda*.

The notable events of the season 1766-7 included a number of Shakespearian productions, and at least five new plays, viz. *The Accomplished Maid*, adapted from *La Buona Figliuola* of Goldoni by Edward Toms, produced on December 3, 1766, and described by Genest as "a mere opera," seemingly founded on the plot of *Pamela*; *The School for Guardians*, adapted by Murphy from Molière; *Perplexities* (produced on January 31), adapted by Thomas Hull from an earlier play entitled *The Adventures of Five Hours*; and *Love in the City*, "a tolerable opera," by Bickerstaff and Dibdin, and described by the latter in 1788 as having been performed first in 1764 (which I take to be an error).

"In this," says Dibdin, "I composed the

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overture, first chorus, the finales of the first and second acts, and three songs. *Love in the City* has since been altered into the farce of *The Romp*, in which the chorus, the quintetto, the boxing trio, and ‘Dear me, how I long to be married,’ are mine. This music I made Mr. Bickerstaffe a present of.”*

On December 20 the ever-popular *Beggar’s Opera* was given for the benefit of the new Theatrical Fund.

On April 21 Arnold’s unsuccessful opera, *Rosamond*, was produced to Addison’s libretto, also set to music by Arne.

Among the varied claims to fame of Covent Garden Theatre must be included the interesting fact, pointed out by the late Mr. A. J. Hipkins in his article on “Pianoforte” in “Grove’s Dictionary,” that it was there the instrument made its public *début* to an admiring audience in England. A playbill dated May 16, 1767, in the possession of Messrs. Broadwood, announces that after Act I. of *The Beggar’s Opera* “Miss Brickler will sing a favourite song from Judith, accompanied by Mr. Dibdin, on a new instrument called Piano Forte.”

On May 23, 1767, Genest records, “By particular desire, *Love in a Village*, the character

* *Harmonicon*, 1824.;

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of Hawthorn by Beard, being his last appearance on the stage."

It will be remembered that John Beard had been manager from the time of Rich's death. He is said by Genest to have made musical pieces a speciality at the theatre, as Rich had done with pantomimes; and it is, perhaps, not straining the point if we date from his influence and management the period since which Covent Garden Theatre first became essentially associated with the divine art, of which it was to be the home for so many successive generations.

It is pleasant to record the good impression made by John Beard upon his contemporaries. Boaden states that "he retired from the theatre . . . with a handsome fortune, which enabled him to gratify to the utmost the liberality and benevolence of his nature." They who were best able to appreciate him have invariably stated that he was unrivalled as a singer, delightful as a companion, steady in his friendship, and honourable in every relation of life.

To form an estimate of his abilities as a singer, it is only necessary to remember that Handel composed for him the great tenor parts in *Israel in Egypt*, *The Messiah*, *Samson*, *Judas Macchabeus*, and *Jephthah*. Charles Dibdin, himself no mean judge, says—

"I consider Beard, taken altogether, as the

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best English singer. He was one of those you might fairly try by Shakespere's speech to the actors. He did not mouth it, but his words came trippingly from his tongue. He did not out-Herod Herod, but he begot a temperance that gave his exertions smoothness. He never outstepped the modesty of nature, nor made the judicious grieve."

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CHAPTER VI

1767-1772

FROM the year 1767 the fortunes of Covent Garden Theatre enter upon a new phase of existence with the sale of the patents by Rich's executors to four new proprietors, Messrs. Thomas Harris, Rutherford, George Colman, and William Powell.

The first of these four gentlemen had not, it is believed, been connected with theatrical enterprises in any form ; but it is interesting to note that a certain Thomas Harris was one of the witnesses to Handel's will in or about 1759, and it is not utterly impossible that they were one and the same individual. Rutherford appears to have embarked in it as a business speculation ; at all events, Forster * describes him as a "private gentleman." George Colman was the dramatist, who had been yoke-fellow with Garrick in the authorship of *The Clandestine Marriage* ; while Powell had formed one of the company at Drury Lane. He had been a *protégé* of

* "Life of Goldsmith."

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Garrick's, to whom he certainly owed a great deal, and whom he mortally offended by his secession from the theatre, although Lacy, Garrick's assistant manager, somewhat incautiously took it upon himself to assure Powell of Garrick's "benevolent neutrality" in the matter.

It must be explained that a quarrel had arisen between Garrick and Colman in the course of their joint authorship of *The Clandestine Marriage*, into the particulars of which we need not enter here. Early in May of this year Colman's mother (who was a sister of the Countess of Bath) had died, leaving him a legacy of £6000. This strengthened him for a step he had possibly long had in his mind, and that was to prove a serious blow to his associate and quondam friend David Garrick. It appears that the other members of the syndicate, the two "men of mere business," Harris and Rutherford, were the first to treat with Beard and his fellow-legatees in the sale of the patent. Doubtless, Beard, who had, as we know, made one fortune and married a second, was not sorry to dispose of his share of the property. Of the £60,000 which was the sum demanded for the property, Harris and Rutherford were to find half, while the remainder was eventually made up of £11,000 contributed by

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Powell, and the balance of £19,000 by means of Colman's legacy, and a loan from Becket, a bookseller. Thus Colman's monetary contribution was the smallest; but there can be no question that his practical experience in theatrical matters was worth all the other's capital.

There was, it must be confessed, some reason for Garrick's subsequent resentment at Powell's desertion, although the latter, in reality, did nothing but what an energetic young man of pushful character would be right in doing to advance his own interests in life.

Garrick, however, was considerably perturbed. "It is impossible that it should hurt us," he wrote to his brother (the wish, doubtless, "father to the thought"). "If Powell is to be director we have reason to rejoice; for he is finely calculated for management. What a strange affair! We shall know all in time."

He did *not* know when he wrote this what further and heavier blow fate had in store for him; but he wrote again—

"I am sure there is something in it, and yet the more I think of it, the more I am puzzled. Who finds *money*? What is the *plan*? Who are the *Directors*? Damn me if I can comprehend it! But I shall know more. I have not the least notion of their doing anything to give us one moment of uneasiness."

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Poor Garrick! Every word of his letter tells of the manifest uneasiness and worse than uneasiness that he was suffering.

Eventually, on May 14, 1767, the contract was completed, and the theatre passed from the family of Rich, who had had it for thirty-five years, into the hands of the four new proprietors, one at least of whom bore a name, then unknown, that was destined to be writ large in theatrical annals for fifty years to come.

Another important desertion from Drury Lane occurred in the persons of Yates and Mrs. Yates, "an exquisite gentle actress," according to Forster. This latter was doubtless due to the influence of her old friend and fellow-actor, Powell, and his erstwhile manager, Colman.

Garrick now had reason indeed for uneasiness.

"Powell is a scoundrel," he said, "and Colman will repent his conjunction in every vein. [This latter prophecy possibly came true enough.] I hope to G— that my partner has not talked to Powell of any agreement, or a friendly intercourse between the houses; that would be ruin indeed! I cannot forgive Powell!"

His partner, Lacy, had, however, done as Garrick feared; which Garrick lost no time in cancelling. Moreover, out of the money (amounting to £1000) forfeited by Powell on breaking his engagement, he brought over Barry

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and Mrs. Dancer to Drury Lane by an offer of £1500 a year, and openly prepared for war.

The agreement between the new proprietors contained the important proviso that Colman was to be stage manager "under certain restrictions." Genest calls it "acting manager," but this conveys to the modern theatrical expert a wrong idea of the duties, as in the eighteenth century acting manager properly signified "one who manages the acting," and included the acceptance or rejection and production of plays, a *rôle* which certainly does not now usually appertain to the oddly named "acting manager" of to-day.

Apparently Colman's services were to be gratuitous, a circumstance that excited Garrick's derision, for he told Colman he would gladly pay his partners £500 a year to be let off his duties as acting manager.

It appeared from the disputes which were afterwards made public property that Harris and Rutherford, as the original movers in the purchase, had invited Powell to join them, as possessing theatrical experience. He refused, unless Colman (with whom he was associated at Drury Lane under Garrick) also consented to become a partner in the concern, and finally the arrangement was made that the first two should confine their attention to the control of



GEORGE COLMAN.

From the Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, engraved by E. Scriven.

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the treasury and accounts, while the technical details were to be attended to by Powell and his friend Colman. There was a third and highly important proviso, viz. that Colman should communicate to his partners any important measures he intended to take, and that they should have the right of veto on these, which was to be signified in writing to their colleague. It is not to be wondered at that such a complicated agreement, bristling with opportunities of disagreement, soon brought forth a crop of troubles.

This was partly owing to the fact that Harris and Rutherford, who were evidently intimate friends, immediately upon the completion of the agreement, set out for six weeks' holiday in the country, leaving Colman the unenviable task of getting the theatre ready for the autumn season.

And this brought about the first event which disturbed the peace of the partners, which was nothing less than the acceptance by Colman of a play entitled *The Good-natured Man*, written by Oliver Goldsmith.* It was an event that proved so momentous both to Goldsmith and the theatre that we shall be pardoned for going into the matter in some detail.

* Oliver Goldsmith, poet, dramatist, and miscellaneous writer, 1728-1774.

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It was, according to Mr. Forster, the great success of Garrick and Colman's *Clandestine Marriage*,* first produced at Drury Lane in February, 1766, that first turned Goldsmith's thoughts to the theatre, with serious intention to try his own fortune there. Poor Goldsmith's literary success had apparently unsettled his mind, and by bringing him into occasional good company, tempted him to habits of greater expense, while still without a corresponding increase of means to afford it. At all events, he resolved to attempt a comedy. It seems that while the play was in progress of construction it was intended for Beard. But Covent Garden Theatre's affairs had been in such confusion since Rich's death six years before (November 26, 1761), that Goldsmith resolved to make the first offer of *The Good-natured Man* to Garrick at the Lane. It was finished early in 1767, and accordingly, through the friendly offices of their mutual friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, of whom it might indeed be said that

* A comedy in five acts, first performed at Drury Lane Theatre, February 20, with King as Lord Ogleby, Yates as Sterling, Powell as Lovewell, Holland as Sir John Melvil, Baddeley as Canton, Palmer as Brush, Love as Sergeant Flower, Lee as Traverse, Aiken as Trueman, Mrs. Clive as Mrs. Heidelberg, Miss Pope as Miss Sterling, Mrs. Palmer as Fanny Sterling, Mrs. Abington as Betty (and Miss Crotchett in the Epilogue), since played many times at Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the Haymarket, the Olympic, the Princess's, and the Gaiety Theatres, and, as lately as March, 1903 by Mr. Cyril Maude at the Haymarket.

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he was every human being's friend, a meeting between Garrick and Goldsmith took place in Reynolds's house in Leicester Square, the famous old mansion so well known to musical Londoners as the home of Puttick and Simpson. At this meeting, of which Davies, in his "Life of Garrick," has given an amusing description, it appears that from the very first the course of negotiations had a tendency to become strained. The manager, he says, was more ostentatious of his abilities to serve a dramatic author than became a man of his prudence.

It was not the first time Garrick had had difficult relations with dramatic authors.

"I am as much an admirer of Mr. Garrick," said Mr. Ralph, in his "Case of Authors by Profession" (published in 1758), "and his excellences as I ought to be, and I envy him no part of his good fortune. But then, tho' I am free to acknowledge he was made for the stage, I cannot be brought to think the stage was made only for him, or that the fate of every dramatic writer ought either to be his, to be at his mercy, or that of any other manager whatever; and the single consideration that there is no alternative but to fly from him, in case of any neglect or contempt to Mr. Rich, is enough to deter any man in his senses from embarking a second time on such a hopeless voyage."

Manifestly, however, this was neither the

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fault of Rich nor of Garrick, but of the system which left both to shift as they could, and made self-protection the primary law.

“The manager,” he continues (and Mr. Forster points out that Ralph admits the whole question at issue in his complaints), “whether player or harlequin, must be the sole pivot on which the whole machine is both to move and rest ; there is no drawback on the profit of the night in old plays ; and any access of reputation to a dead author, carries no impertinent claims along with it.”

Goldsmith, on his side, was fully persuaded of his own importance and independent greatness. This frame of mind of the high contracting parties was hardly auspicious, but they separated with an understanding that the play would be acted. Then ensued what all dramatic authors find vexatious and annoying, viz. excuses and delays on the part of the autocratic manager. Nor did poor Goldsmith's worries cease there, for Garrick did not scruple to criticise the play in the freest possible manner. Interviews followed, explanations and proposals for alteration ; doubtful acquiescence and doubtful withdrawal of it, and in the mean time the theatrical season passed away.

“Such,” says Mr. Forster, Goldsmith's biographer, “was the state of things when a piece

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of news came suddenly to their knowledge, in no small degree interesting to both. Beard's uncertainty as to his own and his late father-in-law's property in Covent Garden Theatre had closed at last in a very unexpected arrangement, and order came out of confusion in the affairs of the theatre." *

Naturally this was highly important to Goldsmith, who, on learning what had happened, immediately made overtures to Colman, the new manager, with most satisfactory results. Colman, whose new colleagues were, as we know, away from Town, immediately accepted the comedy, and, as he afterwards admitted during his disputes with them, engaged Macklin as one of the stars of the new company. Goldsmith's letters show how warmly he appreciated this encouragement after the shillyshallying of Garrick. On July 19 he wrote to Colman from Garden Court, Temple—

“DEAR SIR,

“I am very much obliged to you both for your kind partiality in my favour and your tenderness in shortening the interval of my expectation. That the play is liable to many objections I well know, but I am happy that it is in hands the most capable in the world of removing them. If then, Dear Sir, you will

* Forster is referring to the sale of the patent to Harris, Colman, and partners.

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complete your favours by putting the piece into such a state as it may be acted, or of directing me how to do it, I shall ever retain a sense of your goodness to me. And indeed tho' most probably this be the last I shall ever write, yet I can't help feeling a secret satisfaction that poets for the future are likely to have a protector who declines taking advantage of their dependent situation and scorns that importance which may be acquired by trifling with their anxieties. I am, Dear Sir, with the greatest esteem, your most obedient humble servant,

“OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

“To George Colman, Esq., Richmond.”

The next day Goldsmith wrote to announce his action to Garrick, who had left London for Litchfield, and, in kindly deference to his old friend's sensitiveness, he used Beard's name instead of Colman's when referring to the matter.

His letter runs thus—

“SIR,

“A few days ago Mr. Beard renewed his claim to the piece which I had written for his stage, and had as a friend submitted to your perusal. As I found you had very great difficulties about that piece, I complied with his desire, thinking it wrong to take up the attention of my friends with such petty concerns.”

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To this Garrick replied in conciliatory terms, and so the incident, as far as Drury Lane was concerned, came to an end.

Unfortunately, however, the troubles of the unlucky dramatist were by no means over yet, for the fair promise with which connection with Colman had started was not destined to continue. Garrick had, with more business-like rivalry than friendliness, started an opposition to the growing popularity of the rival house. This had taken the form of a violent puffing in the public journals and otherwise of a certain Hugh Kelly, one of Goldsmith's own club friends, and the author of a piece entitled *False Delicacy*. Garrick, in spite of his apparent acquiescence in the transference of Goldsmith's play, was determined by hook or by crook to thwart a successful first night of it, and actually wrote a prologue and epilogue for this, touched up the dialogue in parts, and prepared to bring it out at Drury Lane with great *éclat*. Moreover, Colman and he had become reconciled, and it is even said he had won over the latter to some sort of promise that Goldsmith's play should be kept back until Kelly's had been produced; at all events, this was what actually occurred. On January 23, 1768, *False Delicacy* was brought out, with all sorts of managerial tricks to "boom" it, while *The Good-natured Man* was, as Washington Irving says in

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his "Life of Goldsmith," creeping through the last rehearsals at Covent Garden. The fictitious success engineered by Garrick did not fail of its due effect. Author, manager, and actors went about with long faces. Colman's hopes of the piece grew fainter, and his fellow-patentees declared they never had any. All the actors were discontented with their parts except two, whom Goldsmith looked upon afterwards as the saviours of his piece. These were Shuter, the low comedian, and Miss Wilford (Mrs. Bulkeley) as Miss Richland. Goldsmith had, however, one sheet-anchor of good hope, equal in himself to a host of miserable "Job's comforters." This was Dr. Johnson, whom Irving calls "the author's growling monitor in times of heedless levity, and who now stood by him with that protecting kindness he ever showed him in time of need." He attended the rehearsals, he furnished the prologue, he pished and pshawed at doubts and fears on the part of the author, and held him up with a steadfast and manly hand. And the result justified his splendid support. The play was produced on January 29, 1768, and although the reception of the several scenes was varied, the fourth act and the humour of Shuter, who played Croaker, the comic character, saved the piece, and drew down thunders of applause. On the whole, however, both the author and his

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friends were disappointed at the reception of the play, and considered it a failure. It was, nevertheless, performed ten nights in succession, the third, sixth, and ninth being for the author's benefit, and after this, although occasionally revived, it gradually drifted into oblivion, until its reputation was altogether swallowed up by the triumphant success of *She Stoops to Conquer*. In spite of this, the profits resulting were greater than anything poor Goldsmith had yet derived from his works, amounting as they did to something like £400.

One of the reasons given for the late production of the piece had been the quarrels occurring thus early among the new proprietary of the theatre. Colman had rightly insisted upon his right as manager to cast the part of Imogen in *Cymbeline* to Miss Ward, rather than to Mrs. Lessingham,* the mistress of his brother manager Harris, and the violence of the dispute grew so great, that Garrick's hopes not unnaturally grew correspondingly high. At all events, he "fished in troubled waters" to the extent of approaching Colman with the hope of reconciliation, as appears from a letter of Bickerstaff, a rival dramatist, to Colman.

"You told me," he complains, writing on

* Mrs. Lessingham had been a pupil of Rich, and made her *début* as Mrs. Stot, November 18, 1757, in the part of Desdemona.

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January 26, 1768, "that the end of January would be the best time of the year for me, and told me Mr. Goldsmith's play should come out before Christmas. The fact is, you broke your word with me in ordering the representation of the *Good-natured Man* in such a manner as that it must unavoidably interfere with my opera. At the reading, it was said that the *Good-natured Man* should appear the Wednesday after ; but at the same time it was whispered to me that it was privately determined not to bring it out till the Saturday fortnight, and there was even a promise given to Mr. Kelly that it should not appear till after his nights were over."

If such a promise as this had been given, Goldsmith had been well justified in his dissatisfaction with Colman over the lateness in producing his unlucky play.

The managerial dispute between Colman and Harris respecting Mrs. Lessingham ended in the law courts, where it was settled very properly in Colman's favour.

According to Genest, Mrs. Lessingham was a third-rate actress, whose claims to important parts were of the slightest.

On November 4, 1767, a "dramatic elegy, entitled *Lycidas*, intended as a dirge," in commemoration of the Duke of York's death, was performed. Both words and music are attributed to William Jackson, a famous musician of the

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day, known as "Jackson of Exeter." It was never again put on the stage.

Mrs. Yates made her first appearance on October 16 at Covent Garden as Jane Shore, with Mrs. Bellamy as Alicia. William Powell's *début* was made on October 31.

Macklin played Iago to Powell's Othello on December 5, the Desdemona being Mrs. Yates—a remarkably good combination.

On December 14 a new opera by Hull was produced, entitled *The Royal Merchant*, and on January 29 the *Good-natured Man*, of which we have already heard the history.

On February 20, 1768, Colman started his series of Shakespearian adaptations with *King Lear*. This was followed by a new opera by Bickerstaff and Dibdin, entitled *Lionel and Clarissa*, which met with moderate success. Dibdin says he composed for it "about twenty-five things, for which trouble I received at different times £48—giving up the copyright. The sale of this music did not yield much till it came out under the title of *The School for Fathers*." On June 4 the season ended. Since the middle of January the four patentees had been squabbling among themselves, one of the bones of contention, as we have seen, being the ill-advised interference of Harris with the stage management. They now proceeded to air their grievances against each

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other in the public press, a course as ridiculous as it was unnecessary. Affairs reached such a pitch that on June 13 Colman, for fear, as he admitted afterwards, that an attempt was to be made by Harris and Rutherford to possess themselves of the theatre by force, barred and bolted the front doors against them, informing them that, if they wished, they might enter through Powell's house, which communicated with it. From the various accounts now extant, it appears the state of siege continued till June 17, when Harris and Rutherford, at the head of a party of hired men armed with crowbars, came to the Hart Street entrance, and broke in through a window. They then proceeded to carry away the essential portions of the wardrobe, etc., with the intention of rendering the remainder useless. They also carried off music and prompt-books, all of which they promised to restore when an agreement was come to with Colman. They made a suitable end to the whole affair by turning out Colman's servants and watchmen, and leaving a guard of their own instead. After these somewhat comic operatic proceedings, Colman invoked the aid of the law, and protracted legal discussion ensued, greatly to the benefit of the lawyers on both sides, and to the loss of the two parties. Eventually, on July 23, 1770, the lawsuit came to an end, the

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Court deciding that Colman should continue in the management of the theatre, subject to his colleagues' advice, but not to their control, as, to quote the words of Mr. Genest, "that would be an absurdity." Not until October, 1771, however, did a real reconciliation take place, and this, quaintly enough, was only brought about by Harris quarrelling with Mrs. Lessingham.

1768-9 does not seem to have been a specially interesting season. A good anecdote is related by Genest of Mrs. Bellamy, acting Alicia in *Jane Shore*, with the king present among the audience. Apparently the play was not so potent as the wine his Majesty had taken at dinner, for he fell asleep, greatly to Mrs. Bellamy's annoyance, for "she drew near to his box, and with a most violent exertion of voice, which the part admitted of, cried out, 'O thou false lord,' and woke the king; thus, like Macbeth, she murdered sleep, and revenged herself on his Majesty." The principal new productions of the season were *The Royal Garland*, an operetta in honour of the King of Denmark; *Cyrus*, a tragedy adapted from *Metastasio* by Hoole; and Fielding's *Tom Jones*, turned into an opera by Reed. On March 13, *Orestes*, a tragedy written by Voltaire, and translated into English, was performed for Mrs. Yates's benefit.

April 24, 1769, was the date of Mrs. Clive's

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retirement from Drury Lane, the scene of her many triumphs. On July 3 the partnership of the four managers was broken by the death of William Powell at Bristol. He is said to have been a first-class actor, more especially in old men's parts, in which he was only surpassed by Garrick ; and that he was popular with his fellows is evidenced by the grief his death caused them. He left his share in the theatre to his widow, who, according to C. Dibdin, married Dr. Fisher, many years leader of the band. At the death of the widow it descended to Powell's two daughters, who respectively married a Mr. G. White, a clerk in the House of Commons, and Mr. J. Martindale, "proprietor of the Subscription House in St. James' Street."

During this year (1768) Rutherford, who had probably seen enough of the petty jealousies and squabbings that so often dog the footsteps of those who embark in theatrical enterprises, sold his share in the theatre to Messrs. Leake and Dagge, the former being a bookseller in the Strand, while Mr. Dagge* was a solicitor.

The 1769-70 season opened with *Love in a Village* on September 18. Four days afterwards *Henry V.* was performed, and a real horse brought on to the stage for the Champion in the coronation scene. On December 2 was

* Or Degge (Dibdin).

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performed the play entitled *The Brothers*, by the then untried dramatist, Richard Cumberland. Garrick was in the house, and was immensely gratified at an effusive compliment paid to him by the author in his epilogue—so much so, indeed, that he commissioned him to write a play for Drury Lane. On December 19 there was a benefit for the Theatrical Fund, *Macbeth* being played. On February 24 a new play by Hoole, entitled *Timanthes*, was produced, and on May 28 the season closed.

I can find nothing worthy of special mention in the 1770–1 season, unless it be that Mr. Genest records the performance on February 27, 1771, of *The Cure of Saul*, an oratorio or sacred ode, by Dr. Arnold, first brought out at the King's Theatre in 1767. It had apparently been performed at Covent Garden before, but is not recorded until now. This versatile composer also brought out two works of a different calibre this season at Covent Garden, viz. *The Portrait*, a burletta, on November 22, and *Mother Shipton*, a pantomime, on December 26. He does not appear to have done anything for the Covent Garden Theatre again till 1782. It may also be mentioned that Miss Catley reappeared on October 1 as Rosetta in *Love in a Village*.

In the 1771–2 season also there was a dearth

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of novelty. Macklin was playing, and on November 12 an opera by Arne, entitled *The Fairy Princess*, was produced, the libretto being taken principally (by Colman) from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Oberon*. On December 11 a five-act play by Cradock, entitled *Zobeide*, was produced. The plot was partly adapted from an unfinished play of Voltaire's, entitled *The Scythians*. The profits were given by Cradock to Mrs. Yates. On the 25th another adaptation from the French, this time from Molière's *Mariage Forcé*, and entitled *An Hour before Marriage*, was produced. An unusual incident took place on March 9, during the performance of *The Wife in the Right*. Shuter, a generally popular comedian, had previously offended the audience and was hissed, upon which he came forward and apologized for having done so, acknowledging that he had been drunk, and had in consequence been taken ill. On April 21 *Hamlet* was performed, with the famous Drury Lane favourite, Baddeley, of Twelfth Night fame, as Polonius.

From Moore's "Life of Sheridan," it appears that about this period (Grove gives the date as 1770) Elizabeth Linley, who became Mrs. Sheridan shortly afterwards, sang in oratorio at Covent Garden; and although a search has kindly been made by Mr. Shedlock for some

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record of the actual date, it has been without success. At this time Sheridan's father, being opposed to the match, had forbidden his son to communicate with the lovely Miss Linley ; but it is said that, for the privilege of having a few words with her, he disguised himself as a hackney coachman and drove her home from the theatre. After her romantic marriage with Sheridan, in 1773, she never again sang in public.

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CHAPTER VII

1772-1779

WHAT proved to be a memorable season at Covent Garden opened on September 21, 1772, with *The Miser*. Three or four mediocre productions first saw the footlights during the winter ; among them was *Elfrida*, a tragedy by Mason, written twenty years before, and now staged for the first time on November 21, with the music to some of the choruses written by Arne. On December 8 a good farce by O'Brien, called *Cross Purposes* ; and on February 6, O'Hara's burletta, entitled, *The Golden Pippin*, in which Miss Anne Catley's performance of the part of Juno was characterized by so much spirit and humour that it brought her into great popularity, particularly for her singing two of the songs, "Push about the jorum," the tune of which has been used for an endless number of comic songs, and "Where's the mortal can resist me ?" the tune of which is said to have resembled that so long associated with the Advent Hymn. A writer in Grove's "Dictionary" reminds us

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that on February 26, 1773, female voices were first introduced into oratorio choruses by Dr. Arne in his oratorio of *Judith*.

On March 15, 1773, the theatre's title to fame became still more illustrious by the first performance there of Goldsmith's immortal comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*.* It will be remembered that Cumberland the dramatist had written a play called *The Brothers*, produced at Covent Garden on December 2, 1769, at which Garrick was present, and was so pleased with Cumberland's complimentary references to himself that he secured a second play by the new dramatist for Drury Lane. To the success of this play, *The West Indian*, Forster attributes Goldsmith's desire to exert his powers on behalf of the merriment, humour, and character of the good old school of comedy. Colman encouraged him by reviving *The Good-natured Man* at the same time, and he retired to his country lodging at a farm "near the six-mile stone on the Edgware Road" to write it. The farmhouse, belonging to a Mr. Selby, stood, says Forster, on a gentle eminence in what is called Hyde Lane, leading to Hendon, about 300 yards from Hyde village, and looking over a pretty country in the direction of Hendon. It was still standing

* Of this great event the details here given are principally drawn from Forster's "Life" of the author.

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seventy years after, about 1840. It is evidently to this place he refers in a letter, dated September 7 [1771], to his friend Bennet Langton—

“DEAR SIR,—Since I had the pleasure of seeing you last, I have been almost wholly in the country at a farmer’s house, quite alone, trying to write a comedy. It is now finished, but when or how it will be acted, or whether it will be acted at all, are questions I cannot resolve.”

Poor Goldsmith’s malign fate was to pursue his immortal comedy as it had followed *The Good-natured Man*. It was finished, as we have seen, during the summer of 1771. Colman probably had it in his hands that autumn. The whole of the year 1772 was passed in delays and negotiations between author and manager. Forster tells us “that the old fears had been interposed by Colman on the old hackneyed ground.” In the interval it had been recast and strengthened, and yet the timid manager hesitated to accept the masterpiece.

The theatrical season was rapidly passing away, and every day’s further delay was fraught with serious consequences to Goldsmith, who was in grave financial difficulties. It is the same story all over again of his previous experience, and his exasperations culminate at last in a letter to Colman—

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“DEAR SIR,—I entreat you’ll relieve me from that state of suspense in which I have been kept for a long time. Whatever objections you have made or shall make to my play, I will endeavor to remove and not argue about them. To bring in any new judges either of its merits or faults I can never submit to. Upon a former occasion when my other play was before Mr. Garrick he offered to bring me before Mr. Whitehead’s tribunal, but I refused the proposal with indignation : I hope I shall not experience as harsh treatment from you as from him. I have, as you know, a large sum of money to make up shortly ; by accepting my play, I can readily satisfy my creditors that way ; at any rate, I must look about to some certainty to be prepared. For God’s sake take the play, and let us make the best of it, and let me have the same measures, at least, which you have given as bad plays as mine.

“ I am your friend and servant,

“ OLIVER GOLDSMITH.”

This pathetic and desperate letter it might at least be thought would have moved the stoniest managerial heart, but it failed as signally as the others. Colman returned the MS. with the blank pages scored over with disparaging comments and suggested alterations, but promising nevertheless to produce the play. The alterations, however, failed to commend themselves to Goldsmith, who, goaded to desperation,

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actually sent the play to Garrick. This, however, was a course which at once met with the stern disapproval of his friends. Johnson himself pointed out that it would appear as if the play had been rejected by Colman, which would materially damage its chances of acceptance. This it doubtless was that caused Goldsmith to write to Garrick as follows :—

“DEAR SIR,—I ask many pardons for the trouble I gave you yesterday. Upon more mature deliberation and the advice of a sensible friend, I began to think it indelicate in me to throw upon you the odium of confirming Mr. Colman’s sentence. I therefore request you will send my play back by my servant, for having been assured of having it acted at the other house, though I confess yours in every respect more to my wish, yet it would be folly in me to forego an advantage which lies in my power of appealing from Mr. Colman’s opinion to the judgment of the town. I entreat, if not too late, you will keep this affair a secret for some time.

“ I am, dear sir,

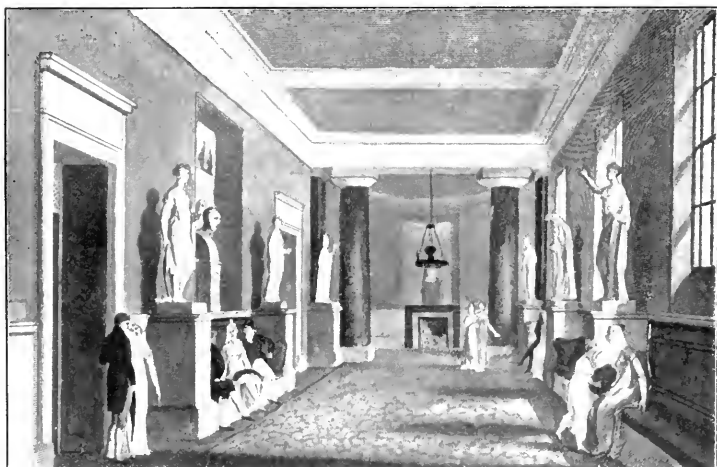
“ Your very humble servant,

“ OLIVER GOLDSMITH.”

Johnson then himself saw Colman on the matter, he told Reynolds afterwards, and “prevailed on him at last, by much solicitation—nay, a kind of force,” to bring forward the comedy ;



VIEW FROM FRONT BOXES OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE (CIRCA 1770).
From an Old Print. (See p. 190.)



SALOON TO PRIVATE BOXES, COVENT GARDEN THEATRE, AS
 RECONSTRUCTED AFTER THE FIRE IN 1808. (See p. 333.)

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but it must be recorded, to Colman's eternal discredit, he still failed to see any merit in it. Forster says, "No laughter, or too much laughter, seemed to be all one to him. He was not to be moved. The plot was, he said, bad, the interest not sustained; it dwindled and dwindled, and at last went out like the snuff of a candle." In a letter from Johnson to Boswell, on February 22, we learn at last that it is to be performed: "Dr. Goldsmith's new comedy is expected in the spring. No name is yet given it. The chief diversion arises from a stratagem by which a lover is made to mistake his future father-in-law's house for an inn." In another letter he says, "Dr. Goldsmith has a new comedy in rehearsal at Covent Garden, to which the manager predicts ill-success. I hope he will be mistaken. I think it deserves a very kind reception."

How deeply was posterity's debt to Samuel Johnson increased by the faithful, ungrudging, and splendid discernment with which he urged the merits of *She Stoops to Conquer*!

However, the troubles were not even yet at an end, for the very actors in the cast, following Colman's example, began to make difficulties. Gentleman Smith threw up Young Marlow, Woodward refused Tony Lumpkin, and Colman himself shared their misgivings. But this time

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Goldsmith determined to stand no more nonsense. The parts refused were recast. Tony was given to Quick, who had played the small part of Postboy in the author's previous production; and to Lee Lewes the harlequin was allotted Young Marlow. Famous was the company, says Forster, at these rehearsals. Covent Garden can hardly, since then, have seen a more illustrious band within its walls—Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, his sister, the Hornecks, Cradock, Murphy, and, of course, Colman and Goldsmith himself. Colman never budged once from his wretched croaking. The applause of friends at rehearsal he denounced as partial. He declined to spend a penny on new scenery, or even to furnish a new dress. In fact, he despaired openly of the play, and thought it “a kind of mercy to help it out of, rather than into, the world.”

Naturally enough, with such a crop of artificial difficulties, others and real ones occurred. No less than five epilogues were composed, and four of these were found wanting before the fifth was accepted. The date of production was fixed for Monday, March 15, 1773. Before this Johnson wrote to Bozzy: “We are all in labor for a name for Goldy's play.” At last the title finally chosen was selected by Goldsmith himself.

The unfortunate author, we are told, left the

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last rehearsal with a heavy heart. To such an extent had the anticipated failure been discounted that it was even announced to the Duke of Gloucester's servant when engaging a box.

At last the eventful evening arrived. Poor Goldsmith was so nervous he could not attend, until, on a friend's insistence, he left his wanderings in the Mall and entered the theatre, at the opening of the fifth act. Unluckily, at that very moment a slight hiss was heard. "What's that?" cried Goldsmith, naturally not a little alarmed. "Psha, Doctor!" said Colman, who was standing in the wings, "don't be afraid of a squib, when we have been sitting these two hours on a barrel of gunpowder!" The authority for this anecdote is Cooke, who had it on that of Goldy himself, Cooke adding that "he never forgave it to Colman to the last hour of his life."

However, the solitary historical hiss was of no importance. It has even been ascribed to the jealousy of his rival dramatist, Cumberland, who was present, and, according to contemporary accounts, could scarcely conceal his annoyance at the general approval. Thirty years afterwards he wrote a ridiculous and garbled account of the "first night," which will not bear investigation, and which Goldsmith's biographers have rightly rejected.

The entire performance was a triumphant

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success. Goldsmith's gratitude to the actors, we are told, was profuse. So grateful was he to Quick, the Tony Lumpkin, that he altered a translation by Sedley of a French comedy, adapted it as a farce, and allowed it to be used on Quick's benefit night.

And now, indeed, did Goldsmith have his fill of opportunities for triumphing over the repentant Colman. A perfect storm of raillery broke over the manager's head. The press teemed with taunts, epigrams, squibs, and censure of every kind. At last he ran away to Bath, in the hopes of escaping it. But it followed him there, and he was compelled to beg Goldsmith to "take him off the rack of the newspapers."

Goldsmith netted something between £400 and £500 by his three benefit nights, and the comedy ran to the end of the season with few interruptions. The tenth night it was played by Royal command, and the twelfth night was the last of the summer season, May 31. It was revived at the beginning of the winter season, and again ran for many nights. It was the last event which connects the name of Oliver Goldsmith with our subject, for on April 4 in the following year, 1774, the forty-third of his age, he was dead.

The remainder of the season can be dealt with in a few lines. On May 1 a tragedy by

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Hull, on the subject of Henry II. and Fair Rosamund, was produced. On May 3, doubtless encouraged by the success of *She Stoops to Conquer*, Colman revived *The Good-natured Man*, and on May 31 the season closed upon the twelfth performance of Goldsmith's masterpiece.

1773-4. The most notable event of this season was the daring innovation introduced by Macklin on October 23 in playing Macbeth in correct Scottish costume. Previous, however, to the relation of this, reference must be made again to the circumstances in which Macklin appeared at all, and to which we have already referred.

The actor hitherto selected for the characters of Macbeth and Richard III. at Covent Garden had been Smith. This gentleman had in the spring signified to Colman his intention of leaving the company. Colman accordingly engaged Macklin, the latter stipulating that he was to play the parts in question, so fulfilling an old ambition he had cherished for many years. Smith then changed his mind and renewed his engagement, making an arrangement to play the parts alternately with Macklin.

Upon the latter's third appearance as Macbeth some hissing was heard, and Macklin jumped to the conclusion it had been organized by some

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two or three brother actors, a theory he was quite unable to prove.

This, whether it was, as we should say, a "put-up job" or not, was seized upon by his enemies as a pretext for demanding his withdrawal from the company. He rightly disregarded the demand, and was met on his next appearance with a perfect storm of disapprobation. Finally, one of the actors came on the stage with a large blackboard, on which was inscribed in white letters—

"At the command of the public Mr. Macklin is discharged."

The rioters then forced Colman to appear on the stage and confirm this, and so the affair ended.

Apparently the parts Macklin insisted on playing were unsuited to him, a fact, as is so often the case, which the actor refused to recognize. Immense credit nevertheless is due to him for being the first to see the absurdity of dressing Macbeth, as all his predecessors had done, including Garrick, Smith, and Barry, in a scarlet and gold tunic, and wearing a wig!

Macklin not only dressed himself, but the subordinate characters, in correct costume. Unluckily, however, his figure was not suited to Highland dress. Genest describes him as a "clumsy old man."

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Macklin had the courage, however, to prosecute his persecutors in the Court of King's Bench, where the great Lord Mansfield decided the action in his favour. Thereupon the actor offered to drop further proceedings if the rioters would pay his costs, take £100 worth of tickets for his benefit, and the same for that of his daughter, and pay a third hundred as some compensation to the management of the theatre.

This they agreed to, and it is satisfactory to think that these eighteenth-century "hooligans" had to pay so dearly for their blackguardism.

The affair, however, considerably disorganized the remainder of the season, and is given as one of the contributory causes of the failure of Kenrick's new play, *The Duellist*, produced on November 20.

The company now engaged at the theatre was a powerful one, including, besides Macklin, Woodward, Smith, Kniveton, Shuter, Hull the dramatist, Lewis, Mattocks and Mrs. Mattocks, Bensley, Mrs. Bulkeley, Miss Barsanti, Miss Wilde, and Mrs. Hartley.

On December 16 a burlesque opera by Arne and Colman, entitled *Achilles in Petticoats*, was produced, and on January 31, 1774, a new comedy of Colman's, entitled *The Man of Business*. These, with one or two other novelties not worthy of special mention, terminated the season.

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It was the last time Colman's name was to appear as manager, for he had sold his share of the patent to his partners, the management of the great theatre devolving upon Thomas Harris, in whose capable and energetic hands it was to continue for many a long season.

The 1774-5 season opened quietly enough towards the end of September with very much the same company as the previous year; but Harris covered himself with glory, and rendered his first season illustrious, by producing, on January 17, 1775, the first of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's two great comedies, *The Rivals*.

It met with none of the obstacles and vicissitudes that had attended poor Goldsmith's masterpiece, and on January 17, 1775, the comedy was brought out at Covent Garden, the following being the cast of the characters on the first night:—

Sir Anthony Absolute, Mr. Shuter; Captain Absolute, Mr. Woodward; Falkland, Mr. Lewis; Acres, Mr. Quick; Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Mr. Lee (afterwards Clinch); Fag, Mr. Lee Lewis; David, Mr. Dunstal; Coachman, Mr. Fearon; Mrs. Malaprop, Mrs. Green; Lydia Languish, Miss Barsanti; Julia, Mrs. Bulkeley; Lucy, Mrs. Lessingham.

It is known that the comedy failed on its first representation, chiefly, it is said, from the

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bad acting of Mr. Lee in Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Another actor, Mr. Clinch, was substituted in his place, and the play rose at once into public favour.

The earliest hint we get of the inception of the immortal comedy is contained in a letter written to Linley, his father-in-law, dated November 17, 1774—

“There will be a comedy of mine in rehearsal at Covent Garden within a few days. I did not set to work on it till within a few days of my setting out for Crome (*sic*), so you may think I have not for these last six weeks been very idle. I have done it at Mr. Harris's (the manager's) own request; it is now complete in his hands, and preparing for the stage. He and some of his friends also who have heard it, assure me in the most flattering terms that there is not a doubt of its success. It will be very well played, and Harris tells me that the least shilling I shall get (if it succeeds) will be six hundred pounds. I shall make no secret of it towards the time of representation, that it may not lose any support my friends can give it. I had not written a line of it two months ago, except a scene or two, which I believe you have seen in an odd act of a little farce.”

It is fairly evident that Sheridan took the hint of the main incidents of the plot from his own early career and runaway marriage.

Mr. Fitzgerald, in his “Lives of the Sheridans,”

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quotes the actor Bernard, who was present at the first performance, and who utterly denied the theory, accepted, however, by Mr. Fraser Rae, Sheridan's latest biographer, that the bad acting of Lee as Sir Lucius was answerable for the first-night failure. He attributes it—and certainly with some show of reason—to the fact that the public of the day were too fond of the sentimental drama to immediately appreciate the breezy style first introduced by Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer*. Moreover, they resented Mrs. Malaprop as an inherently improbable character. Bernard says, "It was therefore not less false than ungenerous in Sheridan (who originated this excuse) to transfer to the back of an unfortunate actor a fault which was inherent to his own composition."

In his preface to the published play, Sheridan afterwards frankly admitted that the cause of the temporary failure was haste and undue length. This was afterwards reduced.

On the tenth night of the performance of *The Rivals*, Sheridan introduced a new prologue, spoken by Mrs. Bulkeley, commencing, "Look on this form—where Humour quaint and sly."

On March 2 a new tragedy by Hoole, entitled *Cleonice*, was performed, and on March 4 a handbill informed the audience that Barry, the principal actor of the company, being laid up

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with the gout, his part would be taken by Thomas Hull, who had superintended the rehearsals. On the 18th another new tragedy, entitled *Edward and Eleanora*, by Thomson, was performed; and on May 2 a new farce of Sheridan's, entitled *St. Patrick's Day*,* and now quite forgotten, was brought out. This, according to Mr. Fitzgerald, was adapted by Sheridan for the benefit of Clinch, the second impersonator of Sir Lucius. It is also said to have been written in forty-eight hours.

The 1775-6 season was signalized by the return of Thomas Sheridan, the actor and father of the dramatist, to the scene of his successes of twenty years before. He reappeared as Cato, and his son wrote to Dr. Linley that he was "astonishingly well received."

On November 21 the third and last production at Covent Garden of Sheridan's genius, viz. *The Duenna*, was first brought out. The following letter relating to it was written by Sheridan to his father-in-law, Dr. Linley, who had, says Moore, "selected and composed the music for it." Part of the music was also composed by young Linley, the doctor's son and Sheridan's brother-in-law. The opera is now forgotten, but it had a quite remarkable run of seventy-five nights, and is altogether worthy of particular

* See Moore's "Life of Sheridan," vol. i. pp. 148, 149.

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record, both on account of its author and its composer. Mr. Linley was at Bath.

“DEAR SIR” (the letter runs),

“We received your songs to-day, with which we are exceedingly pleased. I shall profit by your propos^d alterations; but I’d have you to know that we are much too chaste in London to admit such strains as your Bath spring inspires. We dare not propose a peep beyond the ancle on any account; for the critics in the pit at a new play are much greater prudes than the ladies in the boxes. Betsey* intended to have troubled you with some music for correction, and I with some stanzas; but an interview with Harris to-day has put me from the thoughts of it and bent me upon a much more important petition. You may easily suppose it is nothing else than what I said I would not ask in my last. But, in short, unless you can give us three days in town, I fear our opera will stand a chance to be ruined. Harris is extravagantly sanguine of its success as to plot and dialogues, which is to be rehearsed next Wednesday at the theatre. They will exert themselves to the utmost in the scenery, etc.; but I never saw any one so disconcerted as he was at the idea of there being no one to put them in the right way as to music. They have no one there whom he has any opinion of. As to Fisher (one of the managers and leader of the band), he

* His wife, *née* Elizabeth Linley.

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don't choose he should meddle with it. He entreated me in the most pressing terms to write instantly to you, and wanted, if he thought it could be any weight, to write himself. Is it impossible to contrive this? Couldn't you leave Tom to superintend the concert for a few days? If you can manage it, you will really do me the greatest service in the world. As to the state of the music, I want but three more airs; but there are some glees and quintets in the last act that will be inevitably ruined if we have no one to set the performers at least in the right way. Harris has set his heart so much on my succeeding in this application that he still flatters himself we may have a rehearsal of the music in Orchard Street to-morrow sennight. Every hour's delay is a material injury both to the opera and theatre, etc., etc.

“Your ever sincere and affectionate,

“R. B. SHERIDAN.”

The following letter from Dr. Linley to Garrick was apparently written previously to the one last quoted, as, although it refers to some music already written, the opera was evidently not ready for the rehearsals mentioned in the last. It is dated September 28, 1775, and, as Mr. Fitzgerald points out, is written in a deprecatory tone, the writer feeling that, if the opera proved a success, it must, of course, draw audiences away from his friend and patron's theatre.

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“There is a circumstance, because relative to myself in the good opinion I wish you should preserve of me, that I must mention ; otherwise I know not if I ought. It is, that as often as I am called upon, I have promised to assist Sheridan in compiling—I believe it is the properest term—an opera, which I understand from him he has engaged to produce at Covent Garden this winter. I have already set some airs which he has given me, and he intends writing new words to some other tunes of mine.

“My son has likewise written some tunes for him, and I understand he is to have others from Mr. Jackson of Exeter. This is a mode of proceeding in regard to his composition I do not by any means approve of. I think he ought first to have finished his opera with the songs he intends to introduce in it, and have got it entirely new set. No musician can set a song properly unless he understands the character and knows the performer who is to exhibit it.

“For my own part, I shall be very unwilling for either my own name or my son’s to appear in this business, and it is my present resolution to forbid it ; for I have great reason to be diffident of my own abilities and genius, and my son has not had experience in theatrical compositions, though I think well of his invention and musical skill. I would not have been concerned in this business at all but that I know there is an absolute necessity for him to endeavour to get some money by this means, as he will not be prevailed upon to let his wife sing

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—and, indeed, at present she is incapable—and nature will not permit me to be indifferent to his success.”

Mr. Fitzgerald points out that it was actually while working for Harris, who had brought him forward, that Sheridan was maturing his plans for securing the rival theatre, which it was known would presently be in the market.

A further letter, from Sheridan to his father-in-law, shows how vividly the author described to the composer the various effects he required the music to produce :—

“Mattocks [song] I could wish to be a broken, passionate affair, and the first two lines may be recitative, or what you please uncommon. Miss Brown sings hers in a joyful mood; and, for variety, we want Mr. Simpson’s hautboy to cut a figure, with replying passages, etc.”

A pathetic incident, oddly unfamiliar to the character of Sheridan, is related by Moore as occurring during the run of the opera. Sheridan had quarrelled with his father, the old actor, who had never forgiven the runaway marriage with Miss Linley, and—

“having heard from an old family servant that his father (who still refused to have any intercourse with him) meant to attend, with his daughters, at the representation of the piece,

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Sheridan took up his station by one of the side-scenes opposite to the box where they sat and there continued, unobserved, to look at them during the greater part of the night.

“On his return home he was so affected by the various recollections that came upon him that he burst into tears, and being questioned as to the cause of his agitation by Mrs. Sheridan, to whom it was new to see him returning thus saddened from the scene of his triumph, he owned how deeply it had gone to his heart ‘to think that *here* sat his father and his sisters before him, and yet that he alone was not permitted to go near them, or speak to them.’”

There is a reference in a letter of Sheridan's to Dr. Linley, quoted by Mr. Fraser Rae in his “Life,” that cannot now be explained. It runs thus: “I am finishing a two-act comedy for Covent Garden, which will be on rehearsal in a week.” Nothing, adds Mr. Rae, is known about this piece.

The sad fate of the beautiful but frail singer, Mrs. Cargill (Miss Brown), who was the original Clara in *The Duenna*, is well known. She had been touring professionally in India, and was in 1784 returning to England in a packet boat, the *Nancy*. Unhappily the boat was wrecked off the coast of Scilly, within sight of home, and seven days afterwards, says Boaden, “the body of this lovely creature was found floating in her

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chemise, as she had lain in her bed, and in her arms, inseparably clasped, the infant of which she had been delivered." A miserable end to a melancholy career.

Mr. Sutherland Edwards says, in a footnote to Mr. Rae's "Life of Sheridan," vol. i. p. 305 —

"In spite of the simplicity and charm of many of the melodies composed for the work by Linley; in spite, above all, of the ingenuity, wit, and humour of the piece, it may be doubted whether Sheridan's *Duenna* will ever be played again in its original form."

There can be little doubt that to Covent Garden would have fallen the signal honour of producing his yet more inimitable comedy of *The School for Scandal*,* had it not happened that between the writing of the two productions Sheridan became heavily interested in Drury Lane Theatre by his purchase of part of Garrick's share in the patent and consequent assumption of the management, and so the chance of adding another leaf to the theatre's crown of laurels fell to its great rival.

The year 1775 saw the seal of official recognition set upon the excellent work commenced ten years before, under the inspiration of good

* *The School for Scandal* was produced at Drury Lane, May 8, 1777.

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old Thomas Hull, by the passing of an Act of Parliament whereby the Fund and its subscribers were incorporated under the name and style of "The Society established for the Relief of indigent persons belonging to the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden."

The preamble of the Act sets out that the contribution was begun at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in or about the year 1765, for the benefit of old actors compelled to retire from the stage, or those incapacitated by sickness, or the widows and children of those who died in poor circumstances. It sets out that a sum of about £4300 was then in the hands of trustees, who were by the Act constituted into a committee consisting of the following gentlemen: Thomas Hull, George Mattocks, Thomas Baker, John Dunstall, Frederic Charles Reinhold, Robert Bensley, Matthew Clarke, Richard Rotton, and William Thomas Lewis, for the administration of the Fund. These gentlemen were also obliged to be re-elected annually, to appoint officers, and, in fact, to have absolute control of the Fund.

At the beginning of the following season, November 1, 1776, a famous old Covent Garden actor passed away in the person of Edward Shuter, "Ned Shuter," as he was affectionately called. His *forte* lay in low comedy, in which

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his faculty of distorting the muscles of a naturally quaint countenance aided him greatly. Genest records that "he was the delight of all that knew him, on or off the stage." His connection with the theatre had begun as a boy, when Garrick, in June, 1746, had first appeared there, and with but few exceptions he remained there until his death.

Curiously enough, this almost synchronized with a more momentous event—the retirement of his old fellow-actor, Davy Garrick, now the acknowledged head of his profession, and, as Goldsmith wrote, "an abridgment of all that was pleasant in man."

On June 10, 1776, Garrick made his last bow from the stage of Drury Lane.

The retirement of Garrick, however, hardly lessened the sum total of Drury Lane's attractions, since the 1776–7 season found a dangerous rival to Covent Garden in Garrick's successor, Sheridan. Added to his incomparable talents as a dramatist were his brilliant powers as a society and political favourite, and these were certain to prove a centre of attraction to the smart world of the day. He was enabled to persuade a valuable recruit to join his banner in the person of the lovely Mrs. Robinson,* who made

* Afterwards celebrated as Perdita, and for her connection with George IV. when Prince of Wales.

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her first appearance under the powerful ægis of David Garrick himself, who had long been interested in her. A careful search has been made for any record of this lady having appeared at Covent Garden Theatre, but without success.

At Covent Garden the first noteworthy event was the production, on November 14, 1776, of Dibdin's *Seraglio*.* It was first offered Garrick, but the negotiations came to nothing, and—

“eventually it was accepted by Mr. Harris, who made a stipulation that he was to alter the piece in whatever way he pleased. In consequence of this, when I came to read in the paper the plot of the *Seraglio* . . . I found it totally different from that which I had sent. I had, previous to my departure for France, placed my affairs in the hands of Dr. Arnold, who superintended them till my return. . . . In the Dr.'s letter that accompanied the account of its reception he says, that if I were to see it I should scarcely know my own piece. Mr. Harris also obliged him to new set some of the songs, which he assures me was a most irksome task, but he rather undertook it than that the piece should not be performed. The benefit for this yielded me £48.”

A musical event of some importance was the

* *Harmonicon*, June, 1824.

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performance, on December 6, 1776, of *Caractacus*, for the following notes on which (by Mr. J. S. Shedlock) I am indebted to the *Musical Times* of February 1, 1899:—

“Mason’s drama *Caractacus* was produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, on December 6, 1776, with incidental music by Thomas Augustine Arne. Arne provided an overture and incidental music only for the Druidic Scenes in the Drama . . . there are, however, several points in connection with it which are certainly deserving of notice. . . .

“When Arne published his *Caractacus* Music, he wrote some introductory remarks, concerning which the ‘Dictionary of National Biography’ observes that ‘Arne shows a curious insight into the relationship between dramatic poetry and music.’ The writer (Mr. Barclay Squire) further remarks: ‘He (Arne) expresses opinions on the subject the truth of which, though couched in the stilted language of the period, is only beginning to be recognized at the present day.’ Now, the opening words of Arne fully bear out the above comment. He says—

“‘The design of this music is to represent, by corresponding sounds and rhythms, the Ideas expressed and those alluded to in the Drama, principally in it’s lyric parts; the former is attempted to be done by the *vocal*, the latter by the *instrumental* music.’

“. . . From many other remarks in the

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Introduction it is sufficiently clear that Arne was trying to write music which would only have force and meaning if heard in connection with stage action. . . .

“The *New Morning Post*, or *General Advertiser*, of December 7, 1776, in noticing the production of the work, congratulates the town ‘on the acquisition of so fine an entertainment as *Caractacus*, where poetry and music unite their fascinating powers.’

“There is an interesting letter from W^m Mason, author of the play, to Tho^s Harris, manager at Covent Garden, which shows that he, too, was concerned about the union of poetry and music. He had altered his play, which at first was published merely to be read. He had curtailed it, but he fancies ‘it may still be too long for representation.’

“‘If, therefore,’ he continues, ‘upon rehearsal with the music you should find this to be the case, I will send you a second copy, in which several other lines and passages shall be marked with inverted commas, which you may either omit, or retain, as shall then seem expedient.’

“The poet therefore looked upon the musician as an ally, as one who was trying to strengthen his drama.”

Mr. Shedlock, however, doubts whether it would be worth reviving at the present day.

According to Busby’s “History of Music,” *

* Vol. ii. p. 463.

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the MS. of Arne's music to *Caractacus* was lost.* Mr. Busby never saw either the MS. or the published score, for he says in a note: "The public has been deprived of what my late friend, Dr. Arnold, who had perused the score, described as containing some of the brightest and most vigorous emanations of our English *Amphion*."

Although Genest asserts that Harris refused benefits for the Theatrical Fund, I find he has himself recorded at least one, on December 17, 1776. On December 27 the *Tempest*, contracted to three acts, "on account of the additional airs," probably by Dr. Arne, was performed at Covent Garden. On January 13 Woodward, a famous actor, made his last appearance in the character of Stephano. He died on April 17, and left a gap among comedians that it was hard to fill.

On January 10, 1777, another great actor quitted the world's stage, viz. Spranger Barry. His voice is said to have had melody, depth, and strength, his person was noble and commanding, his action graceful and correct, and his features regular, expressive, and handsome. Moreover, he alone among all Garrick's contemporaries may be said to have rivalled him.

A third prominent member of the Covent

* Probably in the 1808 fire.

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Garden company retired this year in the person of Miss Maria Macklin.

During this season, in Lent, Dr. Arnold's oratorio, *The Resurrection*, was brought out at Covent Garden. Busby says that "its general merit was well calculated to sustain his reputation, but on account of the attendant expenses produced much less profit than some."

Anna Storace made her first appearance at Covent Garden during the oratorio season as a girl singer. She was only eleven years old at the time.

We shall hear of her again twenty-three years later, when, at the height of her fame as an artist of European celebrity, she again returned to Covent Garden Theatre.

In 1777 Colman took the Haymarket Theatre, and engaged one or two old Covent Garden favourites, notably Miss Barsanti. He was fortunate also in securing the services of Miss Farren, then a very young girl, under twenty, and of Bannister, the comedian. The first named is famous on account of her determination never to wear man's clothes. In some of her characters she was thereby reduced to the necessity of appearing in a kind of "hermaphroditic" garb of an Eastern character, in which she considered the proprieties were not outraged. The end of this autumn saw a great loss to the

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English stage in the death of Samuel Foote, the celebrated comedian, aged 57. His name was more familiar at Drury Lane than at Covent Garden, but he had played at the younger house in some of his most successful parts.

During the year 1777 a useful actress in the person of Mrs. Kennedy, at that time unmarried, was added to the Covent Garden company. This lady was the pupil of Dr. Arne, and was introduced to Arne by some of the company, who, frequenting a public house in St. Giles's, were struck with the voice of a young Irish woman who waited on the guests, and who, on being requested, sang the company a song. These persons having described to Dr. Arne the fine quality of her voice, he went to hear her, and took her under his tuition. Eventually he took her to Mr. Harris, and she made her first appearance as Macheath in *The Beggar's Opera*, in which she introduced Arne's celebrated hunting song, "A hunting we will go," composed for the occasion. Notwithstanding some personal disadvantages with which she had to contend, her fine voice had the effect of almost fascinating the audience. She afterwards married a Dr. Kennedy, and remained a public favourite at Covent Garden and Vauxhall Gardens for many years.*

1777-8. I can find nothing worthy of special

* Parke.

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mention this season but the two new productions, *Love finds the Way*, an opera adapted from the old *School for Guardians* of Murphy, and Home's tragedy of *Alfred*. *She Stoops to Conquer* now begins to find its way regularly into the bills. There was, as always, a good sprinkling of Shakespearian plays, and on February 4, 1778, Mr. Genest actually admits of *Poor Vulcan*, a new production of Dibdin's, that it was a "good burletta." Dibdin, however, complains that the alterations of Mr. Harris spoilt its chances of success.

"From the beginning of the 2nd act to Vulcan's soliloquy is as dull as anything possibly can be, and the reason is, the burlesque is totally dropt, and Adonis—by the assistance of Mr. Hull's somniferous muse—converted into a sighing, dying, sleeping swain; whereas I had made him a burlesque character as well as the rest. The benefit yielded about £95. . . . At this time the expense of the benefits was raised, by the famous coalition of Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Harris, to a hundred guineas. I, however, would not pay it, nor was it, after my positive refusal, insisted on."*

Dr. Arne, who had left such an enduring mark upon English music, died on March 5, 1778, aged sixty-eight years.

The company for this season included Tate

* *Harmonicon*, 1824, p. 105.



CHARLES DIBDIN.
From an Old Print.

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Wilkinson, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Mattocks, Lee Lewes, and several other good performers.

During the year 1778 Charles Dibdin, then thirty-three years of age, and in the full vigour of his remarkable abilities, was appointed composer and musical director to Covent Garden Theatre at a salary of £10 a week, amounting to £300 during the season. According to Kitchener, his first biographer, he was "a brilliant performer on the pianoforte, and had a baritone voice with enough falsetto to sing any song." His singing was remarkable for its distinct articulation, "for," says Dr. Kitchener, "he had that sensible idea about vocal music that the true intention of it is to render the words more impressive."

During the summer of 1778 an extraordinary and unprecedented arrangement had been entered into between Harris of Covent Garden and Sheridan of Drury Lane. This, if it did not actually amount to a coalition, as it was called, was at least a working agreement under which the actors of one house were from time to time lent to the other. Accordingly, in December we find Mrs. Bulkeley, of Covent Garden, acting with the Drury Lane company in *The Stratagem*, while earlier in the season Digges, and later Miss Farren, Miss Younge, and Smith, from Drury Lane, acted at Covent Garden.

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The first night of the 1778–9 season saw two new one-act operettas by Charles Dibdin, entitled *Rose and Colin*, and the *Wives Revenged*,* both of which met with a moderate success. Dibdin himself says they were “performed very frequently and with great applause.” Genest says succinctly that the former “was acted twelve times.” The composer received £50 for each of them [presumably for the words], and £20 each for the music.

It was quite a common occurrence at this time to find a “triple bill” at the theatres. On October 2 a third new operetta of Dibdin’s, *Annette and Lubin*, was first performed, together with *The Busy Body* and *Cross Purposes*. The same remarks apply respecting Dibdin’s account of this as to his last-mentioned productions. A comic opera by Kenrick and James Hook,† *The Lady of the Manor*, was produced on November 23, 1778.

The *Hibernian Magazine* of November, 1778, says, in treating of Covent Garden—

“The Proprietors of the same theatre have also brought out a new pantomime under the title of *The Medley*, consisting chiefly of the most capital scenes and machinery of the late Mr. Rich’s pantomimes, with some new additional

* *Harmonicon*, 1824, p. 105.

† Father of Theodore Hook.

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scenes painted by Mr. Carver. This performance met with great applause, and is likely to have a considerable run."

On January 4, 1779, a pantomime entitled *The Touchstone*, both words and music by Charles Dibdin, was performed at Covent Garden. The author says of it—

"This piece has been attributed to Mr. Pilon and to Mrs. Cowley. The fact is, that in spite of all I could do, Mr. Harris would be trying to foist in alterations, which had very nearly parted us before this entertainment came out. I consented, however, to none but a few that were made by Mr. Garrick."

On May 5, 1779, a benefit for Samuel Reddish was given. He was by no means an actor of the first rank, but a curious story is related of him by S. Ireland. Shortly before his retirement, caused by incipient insanity, he was billed to play Posthumus in *Cymbeline*. He had, however, a fixed impression on his mind that he was to play Romeo, and this remained with him until he was actually pushed on to the stage, when his intelligence returned, and he played the character of Posthumus quite naturally, only falling back into Romeo during the *entr'actes*.

Towards the end of the season, on May 6, a

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new tragedy, entitled *The Fatal Falsehood*, by Hannah More, was acted for the first time ; and the same evening another of the products of Charles Dibdin's inexhaustible genius, *The Chelsea Pensioner*, was produced. His account of the evening is so naïve in its innocent conceit that it must be given word for word—

“This piece came out with Miss More's *Percy* [an obvious slip on Dibdin's part ; *Percy* was produced December 10, 1777], which tragedy, though it is by no means devoid of merit, was not well received ; and my operas had like to have suffered by being in company with it. The success of the *Chelsea Pensioner*, however, was afterwards very flattering, yet it was done but three nights in all, owing to the lateness of the season. Why Mr. Harris has not repeated it since, he knows best, as there were four songs encored on the last night it was performed. This piece was an overplus charge of a hundred pounds. The words I published according to custom, at a loss, and the music, except a few songs which were introduced into a periodical work, never was made public.”

The season closed on May 24. The account of this season cannot be left without references to a famous and romantic tragedy of which the theatre was the scene. A very full account of the circumstances is given in Leigh Hunt's “The

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Town.”* From this source the following details have been extracted.

The Earl of Sandwich, grandson of Charles II.'s Earl of Sandwich, and First Lord of the Admiralty under the North Administration, had for his mistress a certain Miss Ray, whom he had taken from a lowly situation in life and given a liberal education, rendering her as accomplished as she was beautiful. For many years this charming woman adorned Lord Sandwich's house, and it appears, in spite of her equivocal position, succeeded in winning universal esteem and admiration. Unhappily, she met, among the acquaintances of Lord Sandwich, a certain Captain Hackman, who fell violently in love with her, an attachment which she is believed to have reciprocated. At all events, Hackman proposed marriage, and was refused, though from what motive is not very clear. Apparently the elderly lover and protector had wind of the affair, for he placed Miss Ray under the protection of a duenna, who accompanied her whenever she went out. By this time, Hackman, who had exchanged the military profession for the clerical, had become desperate, and, it is believed, resolved to make away with himself in her presence if possible. He accordingly followed her carriage one fatal evening to Covent Garden Theatre, on

* Vol. ii. pp. 157 *et seq.*

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April 7, 1779. She had gone with some friends to see *Love in a Village*. After the play was over she left by the door in the piazza, opposite to the Bedford Coffee House, when, before she could reach her coach, Hackman rushed forward and shot her instantly dead.* He then fired another pistol at himself, but without a fatal effect.

The wretched man was tried, condemned, and eventually hung at Tyburn, and his victim was buried at Elstree, where she had been a happy child with a pretty face, little thinking what trouble it was to cost her.

* The writer has been informed by the Rev. Mr. Hunt, of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, that the famous tragedy did not, as Leigh Hunt states, take place on the piazza side of the square, but opposite to it.

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CHAPTER VIII

1779-1792

1779-80. During this season the Covent Garden company were considerably strengthened by the inclusion of Henderson (according to Boaden, "at this time perhaps the greatest master of the art") and Miss Young from Drury Lane, under the singular arrangement for the exchange of players which then prevailed. Genest mentions Henderson's salary of £12 a week as a leading actor.

On October 18 Henderson created a sensation by his remarkable acting of *Macbeth*.

On October 20 another of Charles Dibdin's musical farces, *Plymouth in an Uproar*, was performed. He tells us "it was a piece brought to me by a seafaring gentleman. I made some alterations in it at his desire, and it succeeded pretty well, being performed about twelve nights. My share of the profits came to about £65."*

On November 10 an unacted play from

* *Harmonicon*, 1824.

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Massinger and Fenton was produced, *The Duke of Milan*, but it only had a short run.

On November 30 Dibdin scored a great success by *The Mirror, or Harlequin Everywhere*. It was performed thirty-seven times, and consisted of three acts of dialogue and songs. Dibdin remarks upon it—

“This piece was strong satire, and therefore cavier (*sic*) to the multitude, who, however, were charmed with the scenery. One circumstance marks this performance strongly. The character of Punch, whose ‘bibbery bino’ begot all the ‘fal de rals’ and ‘te de rees’ which have so largely contributed to make up the reputation of Mr. Edwin, and which was a satire upon nonsense, is now forgotten for nonsense itself. For this piece I received a sixth of the six first nights, amounting to about £130.”

One of Harlequin’s remarks to Pluto in the pantomime may be quoted and laid to heart even in the twentieth century: “If you roast all who cheat the nation, you must very often be damnably put to it for spits.”

On January 18, 1780, Dibdin attempted a serious opera in three acts, *The Shepherdess of the Alps*. He attributes its failure to want of support, which reminds one of the old quip that death is often due to “want of breath.” Vernon, the hero of the piece, told the author that “he

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saw it was the general wish the piece should be damned, and, as in duty bound, he lent it a hand." Dibdin received £17 as his share from the three nights it was performed.

On February 1, 1780, *The Widow of Delphi*, by Cumberland, was first performed, and on the 22nd the famous comedy by Mrs. Cowley, entitled *The Belle's Stratagem*.* It ran for twenty-eight nights. Grove includes the incidental music among the compositions of Michael Arne, who was said to be the illegitimate son of Dr. Arne.

On May 26 an old Covent Garden favourite, Mrs. Green, formerly Jane Hippisley, retired. She was the original Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*, and died in 1791.

There were three notable first productions in the 1780-1 season, *The Islanders* of Dibdin being the first, on November 25, 1780. The author's comments on this are too good to be lost. He says—

"This piece had very good success. . . . I was to have had for it one-third of the first nine nights, but the King coming to the performance on the sixth, I was obliged to submit to take in the tenth, which made a difference to me of more than £50. I, however, from first to last, got by this

* It has since been many times revived in London, and was played at the Lyceum as recently as 1881 by Henry Irving's company.

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piece £350. Instead of coming out in the course of the business for the second season, Mr. Harris made me cut it down into a farce and call it the *Marriage Act*. The alterations this piece underwent previous to its coming out were innumerable. Some few of them were suggested by Mr. Harris, but I'll venture to say it gained nothing by that. . . . It was certainly a very great favourite with Mr. Harris, who advis'd me not to confess myself the author . . . for he said Junius was not yet known, and therefore he would not advise me to declare myself. To be sure there were some flying reports that Mr. Harris wrote it himself, but it will hardly be thought he wished these to be credited."

The second notable event was the first performance (at Covent Garden) of the play *A New Way to pay Old Debts*, in which Kean was afterwards to create such a sensation at Drury Lane as Sir Giles Overreach.

The Covent Garden company was strengthened by the addition this season of Mrs. Inchbald, afterwards famous as a dramatist and as the intimate friend of Kemble—his "dear Muse," as he called her. She made her first bow to a London audience in *Philaster*, on October 3, and acted many leading characters during the season. This accomplished and beautiful woman had been, together with her husband, intimate

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with Kemble and his family for a considerable time, and had, indeed, been acting in the same company at Leeds in June, 1779, when the terribly sudden death occurred of Mr. Inchbald, a man who in an age of politeness was distinguished by his gentleness of bearing and talents, qualities which caused his loss to be greatly felt. Boaden remarks of his widow that with all the captivations of beauty and mental powers, she never accepted a second husband, although he surmises that had Mr. Kemble proposed himself he would not have been refused.

Towards the end of the season Macklin's satirical comedy, *The Man of the World*, was brought out, on May 10, with some success, and on May 28 the season ended.

The 1781-2 season opened with *The Marriage Act* (q.v.) and *A New Way to pay Old Debts*.

On October 27 a new opera of Dibdin's, *Jupiter and Alcmena*, or *Amphitryon*, was performed, and brought the author-composer the handsome sum of £285, although it only ran two nights—a fine testimony to the paying capacity of the theatre.

On November 28 one of O'Keeffe and Arnold's operas, *The Banditti*, was first brought out, and proved a failure. O'Keeffe attributes its failure partly to the audience taking a dislike to lightning

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represented as flashing outside the windows of a dark room, and partly to an old woman character whom Sheridan, who was sitting by O'Keeffe that night in an upper box, advised him to cut out.

Poor O'Keeffe, seeing the utter failure of his piece, rushed home, and in a state of despondency threw himself on his bed. Scarcely had he been there ten minutes when a loud rap was heard at the door, and before John, his servant, could announce them, "in bolted, into the house, up the stairs, and into the bedroom, Mr. Harris and Dr. Arnold, with a cheering to my sorrow and a condolence of comfort." Nor did this generous manager let his benevolence stop at this point. He there and then undertook to pay the whole of the sum, £630, agreed upon as the price of the piece, saying that as it was by his desire the production had been hurried forward, it was only fair he should be the loser, and not O'Keeffe.

It was altered and resuscitated in the next season as *The Castle of Andalusia*, and turned out a great success. Signora Sestini appeared in it, who had been the first comic singer of the Italian opera.

During this season the coalition or working agreement between the two theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane came to an end.

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There were several new productions by Cumberland and others, but space forbids details being given of them.

There is, however, a deeply interesting reference to this season by Charles Lamb (Elia, "My First Play"), for which space must be found. First let me add that, to my thinking, the gentle Elia was a little mixed up in his dates or his titles. He says, "I saw these [my first] plays in the season of 1781-2," and he proceeds to enumerate them as follows: "*Artaxerxes* and *The Lady of the Manor*, followed by a pantomime called *Lun's Ghost*, and Congreve's *The Way of the World*." Further, he says, the playhouse was visited by virtue of certain orders given to his godfather, "who kept the oil-shop (now Davies's) at the corner of Featherstone Buildings, in Holborn." This same oilman was known to and visited by Sheridan, and John Palmer the comedian, and—from his own lips Lamb had it—he used to supply oil for the nightly illumination of the theatre, his sole remuneration being the aforesaid theatre passes. Further, Lamb distinctly states that the visit was to Drury Lane Theatre, for he describes the old disused portal "at the North end of Cross Court," the former pit entrance. However that may be, and setting aside the fact that *Artaxerxes* was originally produced

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at Covent Garden, *The Lady of the Manor* must, I believe, have been seen, if at all, at Covent Garden, where it had been produced three years before, on November 23, 1778. These are the actual words of Lamb's reference to the matter—

“The next play to which I was taken was *The Lady of the Manor*, of which, with the exception of some scenery, very faint traces are left in my memory. It was followed by a pantomime called *Lun's Ghost*—a satiric touch, I apprehend, upon Rich, not long since dead ;* but to my apprehension (too sincere for satire) Lun was as remote a piece of antiquity as Lud—the father of a line of Harlequins, transmitting his dagger of lath (the wooden sceptre) through countless ages.”

In all probability, Lamb had mistaken, as was very natural, a play entitled *The Lord of the Manor*, which was produced at Drury Lane that season, for Kenrick's play, *The Lady of the Manor*. To bear this theory out still further, Congreve's *Way of the World* was produced at Drury Lane that season on April 24, after *The Lord of the Manor* had been twice put on the stage, whereas I can find no trace of either play at Covent Garden for that year.

The acting manager, Thomas Hull, who

* It was over twenty years, if Lamb's own dates are correct.

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had been responsible for many of the adaptations and plays, finding his work too onerous, resigned his position to William Lewis, who henceforward became acting (or stage) manager for many years. *The Castle of Andalusia* was the first piece he stage-managed, in which Harris was able to use some of the elaborate scenery “designed by Mr. Richards, R.A.,* and painted by Carver” for the first production of the piece as *The Banditti*.† From O’Keeffe‡ we learn that Richards worked out his models in cardboard, and “gave his orders to the painters.” Carver was a native of Dublin, to whom Harris paid a guinea a day for his work.

November 29, 1782, saw the first appearance at Covent Garden of Mrs. Abington, who must incontestably have been an actress of the very first rank. Boaden, a critic who was never too easy to please, says of her Lady Betty Modish :—

“In my opinion, nothing in the art ever went beyond this performance. Her acting bore the marks of great application, and was at once surprising and delightful. She seemed to combine in her excellence the requisites for

* John Inigo Richards, *d.* 1810, succeeded Nich. T. Dall, R.A., as principal scene-painter at Covent Garden in 1777. One of the scenes painted by the latter for *The Maid of the Mill*, in 1765, was engraved by Woollett.

† Under this title the piece was revived as lately as September, 1894, at the Haymarket.

‡ Vol. ii. p. 39.

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both the fashionable lady and her maid. She was the most brilliant satirist of her sex. At the time of her first appearance at Covent Garden she was no longer young, having been born in the early thirties."

On April 26, 1783, a version of *Tristram Shandy*, dramatized by Macnally, was produced with, according to Genest, not very happy results. The comedian Richard Yates retired this season, after a distinguished career, mostly passed at Drury Lane.

The "Musical Biography" (Colburn, 1814) gives the name of a pantomime entitled *Lord Mayor's Day*, by O'Keeffe,* as having been the first work at Covent Garden of the well-known song-writer, William Shield, who apparently became composer and musical director this year,† in succession to Charles Dibdin. This famous musician is placed only second to Purcell among British composers by the writer of his life in "Grove's Dictionary." He was the son of a singing master of Swallwell, Durham, and began life as an apprentice to a boat-builder at

* O'Keeffe wrote the parts expressly for the various members of the Covent Garden company, at this time very strong in comedy; and he tells us that Mr. Harris and he passed a whole morning at the Tower among armouries, warders, and horse-mounted kings.

† Parke gives the year of Shield's appointment as 1782, in which year the pantomime of *Lord Mayor's Day*, above referred to, was produced.



WILLIAM SHIELD.

From the Painting by Opie, engraved by Ridley.

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North Shields. During his apprenticeship he continued his musical studies, and eventually became leader of the band at the Scarborough Theatre and concerts. Later on he joined the opera band, of which he finally became principal viola. In 1778 he produced his first opera, *The Flitch of Bacon*, at the Haymarket, a work which led to his being offered the post of director and composer to Covent Garden Theatre. He is remembered as the writer of many songs which have now become classics, such as "The Wolf," "The Arethusa," etc.

In the 1783-4 season no less than four popular comic operas by William Shield were performed, viz. *The Poor Soldier*, with Mrs. Kennedy as Patrick, the Poor Soldier (and in which two famous melodies, "The Brown Jug" and "Sleep On," occur), *Rosina*, *Harlequin Friar Bacon*, and *Robin Hood*, the latter produced on April 17, 1784, to a libretto by Macnally, an Irish lawyer. Shield supplied seventeen new airs to this opera, and adapted twelve old ones. *Rosina* is especially noteworthy by reason of the fact that it contains the air of "Auld Lang Syne."

In regard to the music of "Auld Lang Syne," a writer in the *Musical Times* of March 1, 1905, asserts that the modern tune has undergone a process of evolution, and is really a folk-song

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which cannot be traced to any particular composer. There are, it appears, no fewer than thirteen variants of it, ranging from "Apollo's Banquet," sixth edition, 1690, to Thomson's 'Select Collection of Scottish Songs,' published in 1779. The latter collection contains the tune as we now know it—a melody dear to the heart of every Scot the wide world over.

During the season the name of Kemble first appears in our chronicles, Mrs. Stephen Kemble, the sister-in-law of John Philip, appearing in a subordinate character.

Shortly after the commencement of the season (1783–4), the situation of principal oboe in the orchestra at Covent Garden became vacant by the resignation of Mr. Sharp, a well-known performer, whereupon Shield, the new musical director, recommended Mr. Harris to engage William Parke to fill the vacant position. This gentleman remained in the orchestra for a period of no less than forty years, and we shall have frequent occasion to refer to his valuable memoirs in the course of the work.

Of the performers in *Robin Hood*, Shield's opera, Parke tells us that Bannister, the bass singer, did not know one note of music, in spite of which, however, he never sang out of tune or out of time. He had his songs, etc.,

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“parroted” to him by a Mr. Griffith Jones, who was at that time pianist to the theatre.

In connection with William Parke, the oboist, a curious little circumstance is mentioned in Busby’s “Concert-room Anecdotes”:—

“While swords were in fashion, no executant could perform in public a solo, or concerto, ungraced by a sword, or the semblance of one, and the title of ‘sword-bearer’ was temporarily given to whatever instrumental performer executed a solo. The ceremony of preparation was as follows: When the soloist was about to display his talents, he was presented by the proper official with a sheath and hilt, with which he was begirt before he entered the orchestra. When the solo was concluded the hilt and sheath were returned to the official, and immediately hung up over the chimney-piece of the private room, where they remained till called for by the next sword-bearer. One of the last gentlemen who received this appellation was Mr. William Parke.”

The period with which we are about to deal now, it is necessary to remind the reader, is one which, though comparatively dull and uninteresting to the historian of Covent Garden, is fraught with the most intense interest for all students of the drama, for it was the time in which the wonderful brother and sister, John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons, shone forth

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in the heyday of their superb youth and powers at Drury Lane Theatre.

It was on Tuesday, September 30, 1783, that Kemble made his first appearance at Drury Lane Theatre as Hamlet. Boaden, in his "Life of Kemble," hints that his brother Stephen's failure the week before at Covent Garden as Othello was, so far from being disadvantageous to Kemble, useful as a foil to his own talents. It is doubtful whether at the time the superior actor would have viewed it in that light.

Mrs. Siddons had been before London audiences for some time, but by the rules of the theatre her brother could not at once act with her, as it would have entailed the displacement of another actor.

Harris, like a skilful general, did the best he could with the material at his command to combat the new stars; he made Henderson, Mrs. Crawford, and Miss Younge his trump cards, and with a strong and attractive company generally succeeded in filling the house.

It is of interest to mention that at this time Harris made his powers as a disciplinarian severely felt by the performers under his control.* Attendance at rehearsals was enforced by fines extending through all ranks. Half a crown was levied if the performer did not arrive

* Boaden's "Kemble," vol. i. p. 128.

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during the first act, half a guinea if the whole of the play had been unattended.

The next few years will be only briefly alluded to here.

During the 1784-5 season a version of Beaumarchais' famous comedy, *The Marriage of Figaro*, was brought out at Covent Garden. The account of how this was done is worth repeating.

Holcroft, one of the Covent Garden actors, had heard of the piece being played in Paris, and immediately resolved to go over and get a copy of it. When he arrived there he found great difficulty in procuring a copy. The comedy had never been printed, and the French managers jealously prevented any manuscript copies from going outside the theatre. The only method, therefore, was to see the piece and commit it to memory ; so Holcroft and a friend went to the performance eight or nine times in succession, until they were able to write out the plot and some of the dialogue with sufficient exactness, Holcroft furnishing the technical parts, exits, entrances, etc., and his friend, a young Frenchman, the dialogue. It was then brought to England and handed over to Harris, who had it "translated, cast, copied, recopied, studied, and in one of its longest parts restudied, and played in little more than a month." It appeared on

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December 14, 1784. On January 8, 1785, Pope, who was to become a favourite actor for many years, made his first appearance at Covent Garden Theatre in *Oroonoko*.

On February 21, Sheridan's new play, *The Critic*, was played at Covent Garden for the first time (according to Boaden very badly, from undue haste in rehearsals), having been brought out at Drury Lane October 29, 1779.

Dr. Johnson died December 13, 1784.

The following comic operas and pantomimes of Shield's were produced during 1784-5: *Fountainbleau* (O'Keeffe, November 16), *The Magic Cavern*, *The Nunnery*,* *Love in a Camp* (libretto

* Parke relates an entertaining anecdote of Mrs. Webb, one of the performers in this piece. This lady, an excellent though very irritable actress, being unable to articulate the word *inexplicable*, and Mr. Harris having in vain endeavoured to set her right, she at length impatiently exclaimed, "What the devil does the author mean by writing such d——d nonsense in his piece." This lady was, it appears, a very tall and bulky woman. One day she came to the theatre complaining of a pain in the small of her back, and was incensed beyond measure at one of the actors saying to her, "Pray, Mrs. Webb, which is the small of your back?"

Among the very few interesting anecdotes of the theatre to be found in O'Keeffe's reminiscences is one of the elder Harris. He was a man of immense industry and energy, and after rehearsing for three or four hours, he would "stand in the centre of the stage, put his hands into his coat pockets, and thus give out, 'I am now going away. Has anybody anything to say to me?' and if any member of his great staff had a complaint to make, from the call-boy to the author, they were quietly listened to and justly dealt with." This is only one of the almost countless instances to be met with of the honest and straightforward method of treating all with whom he had business relations of this the Prince of Covent Garden Managers.

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by O'Keeffe, February 17), and *The Cholerick Fathers*.

In the 1785-6 season one great event in our annals must take precedence of all else. This was the first appearance at Covent Garden (on February 25, 1786) of the unrivalled Queen of Tragedy, Sarah Siddons, in one of her most splendid impersonations, that of Belvidera. Mrs. Siddons was at this time about thirty-one years of age, and in the zenith of her fame and glory. We shall hear more of her in connection with our subject many years later. On this occasion Genest records her playing for the benefit of her friend Mrs. Henderson, whose talented husband's premature death on November 25, 1785, had proved a heavy calamity for her and the great theatre. He was accorded the honour, perhaps too freely bestowed in those days, of burial in Westminster Abbey, between the graves of Johnson and Garrick.

Harris next brought forward Miss Brunton, a young actress of some talent and beauty, and who took leading parts with a measure of success. Miss Warren, daughter of Powell, one of the former proprietors of Covent Garden, also joined the company. And on December 20, 1785, *Omai* was produced, a grand spectacle or pantomime by O'Keeffe, which had a great run. It was founded upon the incidents attending Captain

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Cook's recent discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean. During the piece *Wewitzer*, one of the performers, made an oration, spoken as if in the original language of one of the islands, and of which a sham translation was published in the book of words. The scenery was planned by *Loutherberg*,* who, according to *O'Keeffe*, received £100 for his designs. He it was who invented transparent scenery, and who was the first to break up the scene into several pieces, bringing it all into perspective. Before his time the back was one broad flat, the whole breadth and height of the stage. *Boaden* describes this pantomime as being prepared with great taste. He says its success seemed to—

“stamp a character upon the theatre itself which has since constantly adhered to it. The manager, fully alive to the interest he had excited, made arrangements to retain the materials of his triumph. Artists of great merit were engaged in his painting-room, and he constantly kept together a set of pantomime actors, the best in the profession, thus facilitating the labours of stage preparation by the habit of always working together. His machinery was well served, his processions were arranged with skill. In the contest with *Drury Lane Theatre* *Mr. Harris*

* *Philippe Jacques de Loutherberg*, 1740—1812, member of the Academy of Painting, Paris, settled in London 1771, elected A.R.A. 1780, and R.A. 1781.

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had this great advantage, his attention was directed exclusively to his management, and as that was vested in him absolutely for life, he had no check upon him from partners in the concern, and could always command the necessary funds to carry his designs, however expensive, into effect.” *

On February 13, 1786, Mrs. Billington made her first appearance at Covent Garden as Rosetta in *Love in a Village*, and, says Boaden—

“at once took the position of the first and best of all stage singers in my time. . . . The pure and flowing melodies of Arne acquired new graces from her execution of them. The majestic movement ‘In love should you meet a fond pair’ produced an effect which literally haunted the ear. In addition to all this, she was a lovely woman, and graceful in everything she did. At the time of her *début* she was probably not more than eighteen years old, altho’ she had then been married to her husband two years. He was a double-bass player of some repute. Her father’s name was Carl Weichsel, and he had been principal clarinet at the King’s Theatre, while her mother had also been a singer, so that she certainly may be said to have been cradled and bred on the stage. She was the possessor of a voice of remarkable compass, three octaves from A to A in altissimo.”

The following season, 1786–7, Genest says

* Boaden, vol. i. p. 311.

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that Shield's pantomime, *The Enchanted Castle*, "was better than the usual run of such things." Several new operas and plays by various dramatists, Mrs. Inchbald, and others, were brought out, including *The Fair Peruvian*, by James Hook (*q.v.*), and on March 27 the name of Macready (father of the tragedian) first appears at Covent Garden, acting Valentine in *The Intriguing Chambermaid*. Mrs. Yates, who had been a high favourite with Covent Garden audiences, died on May 3, 1787.

Perhaps the most noteworthy event of the 1786-7 season was the appearance (on April 21) at Covent Garden of a talented Jewish lad with a wonderful voice, named Abram, at that time aged about fifteen. This boy was afterwards to become the most celebrated tenor of his day. He was then known as Henry Braham, composer of many operas and songs, one of which (the "Death of Nelson") has certainly earned him a niche in the temple of immortality.

The date of Braham's first appearance in 1787 at Covent Garden is not recorded at all by Genest. The writer in "Grove's Dictionary" mentions April 21* as the date, but Boaden†

* This is the date accepted by the writer in the "Dictionary of National Biography.

† "Life of Kemble," vol. i. p. 397.

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refers to it as taking place on June 2 (which was the date of his second appearance),

“when the bill for Leoni’s benefit operated as an epistle to the Hebrews, and they crowded to assist a singer [Leoni] whom they so justly admired. Among them was to be numbered the aid of Master Braham, who on that night acted, or rather sang, for him in *Poor Vulcan*.”

More will be heard of Braham’s achievements later on in our story.

The opera of *The Fair Peruvian*, mentioned above, came out on March 8, 1787, among the performers being Mrs. Billington, already a hot favourite with the public. One of the nights it was announced for performance, her sudden indisposition compelled Mr. Harris to change the play, there being no lady in the theatre who could undertake her character. The circumstance caused a violent tumult among the rougher elements of the audience, and Charles Bannister, the bass singer, being on the stage while the noise was at its height, was desired by Harris to address the audience. Poor Bannister, who was not remarkable for eloquence, could only stammer out, “Ladies and gentlemen, what will you please to have?” “A pot of porter,” was the reply yelled from the gallery, “for this place is as hot as hell.” The answer caused a shout of approving laughter, which

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fortunately turned the tide of disapprobation and allowed the piece to proceed.

Mrs. Billington, whose popularity was fast increasing, appeared on April 13, 1787, for the first time as Mandane in *Artaxerxes*. On April 24 she sang in the opera of *Nina*, a two-act translation of a French version of Sterne's story of Maria in "The Sentimental Journey." The original French music was by Dalryrac, and adapted by Parke the oboist, while the English libretto was from the pen of "Dr. Walcot" * (*sic*).

A new "general utility" actor engaged by Harris this season, Cubit by name, deserves mention, if we may credit Parke,† as being the hero of an episode generally referred to as a typical absurdity. He was cast for the part of Hamlet at a provincial theatre, and being suddenly taken ill, was allowed by the manager to retire. There being, however, no understudy, the play was proceeded with, the part of the Prince of Denmark being omitted!

The season does not appear to have been distinguished by any remarkable productions. The theatre was, however, partially reconstructed, with Mr. Holland as architect.

The succeeding season (1788-9) saw the final

* The statement is made on the authority of Parke, but "Nina" is not mentioned among the works of Wolcot as Peter Pindar.

† Vol. i. p. 97.

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appearance on the stage of that wonderful old actor, Charles Macklin, then getting on for his ninetieth year—if, indeed, he was not much more than this, as Genest, who is not, as a rule, overcredulous, gives a half assent to the report that when he died, in July, 1797, he was 108 instead of 98, as he himself asserted. At all events, there can be little doubt that no other instance is on record of a first-rank actor performing in public at such an age. His memory did not show any sign of failure until January 10, 1788, when—

“he was playing Shylock,” says *Ayre’s Sunday Gazette* (January 13, 1788) “to a most crowded and brilliant house. In the beginning of the second act he was taken so ill that apprehensions were entertained he would die on the stage; he came forward and addressed the audience nearly in the following words: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, within these few hours I have been seized with a terror of mind I never in my life felt before—it has totally destroyed my corporeal as well as mental faculties. I must therefore request your patience this night—a request which an old man of 89 years of age may hope is not unreasonable. Should it be granted, you may depend this will be the last night, unless my health shall be entirely re-established, of my ever appearing before you in so ridiculous a situation.’”

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“‘This address,” says Genest, “met with the most enthusiastic warmth of reception ; the play went on, and Macklin gave brilliant proofs that old Shylock had not totally forgotten his bond.”

His last appearance on the stage was on May 7, 1789, when he was so feeble that Harris feared he would be unable to go on, and instructed Ryder to be ready to finish the part of Shylock, as he eventually did. However, Macklin went upon the stage, and delivered one or two speeches in a manner which showed he did not understand what he was doing, until he finally gave it up and apologized to the audience, hoping they would accept Mr. Ryder as his substitute ; and so the veteran actor gracefully retired. Macklin lived until July 11, 1797, dying at the age of 98, by his own computation ; but Genest says, on very strong and probable circumstances, at the extraordinary age of 108.

During the year 1788 two of Shield’s musical pieces were performed : “*Marian*, a musical entertainment,” the libretto by Mrs. Brooke, on May 26, and *Highland Reel*, libretto by O’Keeffe, on November 6, both comic operas. Of the latter, Genest says, “It met with much greater success than it deserved.”

On October 10, 1788, Kemble had assumed the position of acting-manager at Drury Lane,

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then under Sheridan's auspices, and, it may be added, greatly to his own discomfort.

A famous story was first dramatized and produced as a pantomime at Covent Garden by O'Keeffe and Shield this Christmas, viz. *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*.

The winter and early part of the year had been clouded by George III.'s illness; but by the beginning of spring he had much improved, and on April 15, 1789, his good Queen emerged from her seclusion by coming to Covent Garden Theatre in state, with the three princesses. Boaden records that "on the appearance of the Queen, a shout arose of transport from the spectators. The curtain ran up and displayed a transparency, which had the words in striking letters, 'Long live the King,' and 'May the King live for ever.'" It seems that "the entertainments of the evening were quite common trash, without the slightest bearing upon the event, viz. *He would be a Soldier* and *Aladdin*."

In spite of Boaden's condemnation, one cannot avoid reflecting that the poor Queen was probably not sorry to find that her evening's entertainment "had not the slightest bearing upon the event."

On March 16 a ballet adapted from the French, and called *The Death of Captain Cook*,

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was produced. At one of the performances of this piece one of the actors, Ratchford by name, impersonating a member of Cook's party, was accidentally run through the body by an actor named Byrn, owing to a real sword being given out by a careless property man.

“The wounded man, from the noise and confusion of the scene, could not make his misfortune known ; but the blood beginning to flow and his writhings of agony, soon proclaimed it to the other actors, who led him off the stage, the audience, in ignorance, applauding, as they thought, a fine piece of realism. The poor man lingered some time, but finally died.” *

Parke informs us that “oratorios unexpectedly started up this season at Covent Garden Theatre at playhouse prices.” It should be explained that hitherto the prices of admission to the oratorios were nearly double those received at the ordinary theatrical performances, the charges being 10*s.* 6*d.* for the boxes, 5*s.* for the pit, and 3*s.* and 2*s.* to the galleries. These performances were only given on the six Fridays in Lent, and were under the direction of Messrs. Harrison and Knyvett, the latter presiding at the organ. The first performance was *The Messiah*, sung by Harrison, Miss Cantelo, and others from the Concert of Ancient Music.” At the end of

* Boaden.

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the second part Madame Gautherot, from Paris, played a violin concerto; "the ear, however," adds the worthy Parke, "was more gratified than the eyes by this lady's masculine effort."

On June 17, 1789, the old King's Theatre, built by Vanbrugh in 1706, met with the fate which seems sooner or later to overtake all theatres, viz. destruction by fire, during the rehearsal of a ballet. In consequence of that calamity the few remaining performances were given at Covent Garden Theatre, that theatre's season having closed. The first of these took place on July 2, and the fourth and last on July 10.*

In March, 1789, an old servant of Covent Garden had passed away in the person of Peter Harris, who had been ballet-master and producer of spectacles there. He does not appear to have been related to his manager, who bore the same surname.

1789-90. On November 24 one of Shield's operas, *The Prophet*, was produced. There were also produced, during the winter and spring, *Marcella*, by Hayley; *The Force of Fashion*, by Mackenzie; *Endora*, by Hayley; *The Czar*, an opera by O'Keeffe; *The Widow of Malabar*; and *The Crusade*, an opera by Reynolds and Shield, of which its own author tells us that "a

* Parke.

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more mawkish hotch-potch . . . was never offered to the public."

On January 20, 1790, Charles Incledon, a famous tenor singer, made his first appearance at Covent Garden Theatre as Dermot in Shield's opera, *The Poor Soldier*. This excellent artist, then about twenty-seven years of age, had started life as a sailor in the Royal Navy, where he remained nearly four years. He remained connected with Covent Garden Theatre for more than thirty years, and we constantly come across his name in Shield's and other operas, oratorios, and concerts. The oratorio season this year presented no new features.

Before the season closed another notable first appearance at Covent Garden was made by a famous Drury Lane actress, Mrs. Jordan, then in the prime of her youth and beauty. She appeared in the character of The Country Girl for a benefit performance, at which all the performers gave their services, a generous custom still happily a special and splendid feature of the theatrical profession.

Parke is the authority for stating that on June 12, 1790, a "serious opera," *Andromache*, was played at Covent Garden, and on July 17 the season closed with *L'Usurpator Innocente*, in which Signor Marchesi performed for the last time in this country.

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1790-1. The Covent Garden company this season included the following names :—

Miss Brunton, Miss Chapman, Mrs. Mountain (whose husband afterwards became leader of the band), Mrs. Wells, Mrs. Mattocks, Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Webb, Mrs. Pitt, Mrs. Esten, Mrs. Harlowe, and Mrs. Bernard. The male actors were : Macready, Quick, Blanchard, Fennell, Bannister, Wilson, Holman, Lewis, and Farren.

The theatre suffered the loss this season of Edwin by death, doubtless hastened by intemperance, but Harris repaired it by engaging Munden, who had a fine provincial reputation as a comedian.

Among the new productions were the following—*The German Hotel*, supposed to have been written by Holcroft, one of the minor Covent Garden actors, who also wrote *The School for Arrogance*, produced on February 4, 1791 ; *The Woodman*, an opera by Dudley and Shield (February 26), which ran thirty-one nights ; *The Merry Mourners*, a farce by O’Keeffe ; *Lorenzo*, by Merry ; *Wild Oats*, by O’Keeffe, for which he received 450 guineas ; *The Dreamer Awake*, by Eyre ; *National Prejudice*, by Simons, and some half-dozen minor pieces.

At the end of this season Drury Lane Theatre

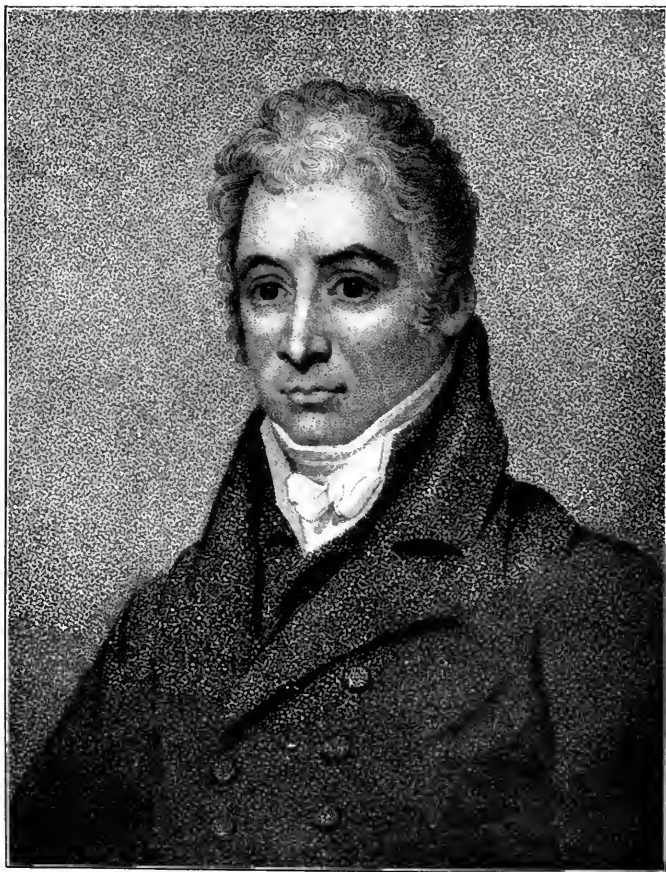
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was reconstructed by Holland. During the oratorio season Messrs. Knyvett and Harrison's singers were reinforced by Mrs. Billington, rightly described by Parke as "a tower of strength."

1791-2. During the year 1791, Shield, whose fertile pen had been so busy during the last nine years at Covent Garden, had a quarrel with Harris, and resigned his position. He employed the time thus set free in travelling on the Continent, visiting the musical centres in France and Italy. During his absence, the composer Joseph Mazzinghi was occasionally employed by the Covent Garden directors. He, in spite of his Italian name, was a native of England, having been born in London in 1765. He had had considerable theatrical experience as musical director at the King's Theatre from 1784. He is still remembered as composer of *The Wreath*, a famous glee.

One of the first new productions of the autumn was a new ballet-pantomime taken from Ossian's poems, called *Oscar and Malvina*,* the music to which was supplied by William Reeve. Shield had commenced to write it, but had left it unfinished, and Reeve, who was then a singer

* The author (Byrne) took the part of Oscar, and Malvina was played by a French actress (Madame St. Amand) especially brought over from Paris.



WILLIAM REEVE.
From an Old Print.

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in the chorus, was applied to to complete it. He thereupon produced an overture and some vocal music, which so pleased the manager that he was given an appointment as composer to the theatre. He had commenced his career as a writer at a law-stationer's in Chancery Lane, where he had for a fellow-writer Joseph Munden, whom he now had as a brother actor at Covent Garden. His musical tastes led him, however, to become a pupil of Richardson, organist of St. James's, Westminster, and he spent two years at Totnes as organist before getting his first theatrical appointment in 1783 at Astley's. The quarrel of Shield with Harris was, as such things often are, the first chance he had of proving his mettle, and he was not slow to rise to the occasion, for he afterwards composed a very large number of operas and similar productions with great success.

On December 3 a comedy (or, according to "Musical Biography," a comic opera) by Mrs. Cowley, entitled *A Day in Turkey*, to which Mazzinghi wrote some songs, was produced, and met with moderate success. On February 2 Merry and Mazzinghi's opera, *The Magician no Conjuror*, was performed, and ran four nights. On February 18, 1792, a new play by Holcroft met with great success, entitled *The Road to Ruin*. It held the stage for at least thirty years

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after its first production, and to continually delighted audiences.

There were many other new productions of no great importance, of which it is impossible to give details.

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CHAPTER IX

1792–1802

DURING the summer of 1792 advantage was taken of the recess to rebuild the theatre almost entirely at great expense,* under the advice of Holland, the architect who had been responsible for the enlargement in 1787. Dibdin tells us that the then Duke of Bedford lent the proprietors £15,000 towards the expense of rebuilding, granted them a new lease, and raised the rent to £940 per annum.

At the opening of the theatre, on September 17, the shilling gallery was abolished, and several slight increases were made in the prices to recoup the proprietors for their outlay, and the following apology appeared in the play-bill:—

“ Without insisting on the great expence that has been incurred in rebuilding this theatre, it appears upon the books that the annual disbursements of the past seasons have been gradually increasing from year to year, under the direction of the present proprietor, to nearly

* Boaden mentions £25,000 as the figure.

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the sum of £10,000 per annum more than the usual expenditure of any of his predecessors—it is therefore trusted the necessity of the following small advancement of the prices of admission to the Boxes and Pit will be sufficiently apparent to the justice of that public whose liberality has never yet been doubted.

“ E. BARLOWE, Treasurer.

“ Boxes, 6s. Pit, 3s. 6d. Gallery, 2s.”

This apology failed to conciliate the angry galleryites, who resorted to their usual riotous tactics, with the result that later on, on October 1, the shilling gallery was reopened.*

On November 3, *Hartford Bridge ; or, The Skirts of the Camp*, by Pearce and Shield, was first produced. Shield was also responsible for a successful pantomime called *Harlequin's Museum*, in which a “Fox Chace with real Hounds and Horses” was introduced.

Mr. Boaden attributes the smoothing-over of the gallery trouble to the tact of Lewis, the stage-manager.

* Boaden thus describes the renovated house :—

“ Mr. Holland had constructed, in the recess, a theatre in the lyral form, rather solid than light in its appearance, and of which the fronts of the boxes bulged something in the curve of a ship's side. The effect was grand and imposing ; . . . but the two-shilling gallery had been hoisted up to the mansions of the gods, and those turbulent deities were indiscreetly banished the house altogether. The decorations of the new house were of a fawn colour with green and gold panels. The cappings of the boxes were of green morocco leather, the stuffed seats of the same colour.”

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“There was a frankness about him that testified to the honest truth that came from him. He was firm as a gentleman always is, and . . . after a slight arithmetical difficulty as to the amount of specie that would be required at the pit-door, in which it was luckily ascertained that three persons came to just half a guinea, . . . the new rate was found rather a convenience than otherwise.”

Pope rejoined the company this season, to Mr. Harris's great content. On December 1, 1792, Morton's play of *Columbus* was produced, and met with a success prophetic of the large sums of money the author was to receive in later years for his famous comedies. He was, it may be mentioned, father of that Maddison Morton who was responsible for the never-to-be-forgotten farce of *Box and Cox*.

Among the notable events of this season one is invariably recorded by all dramatic writers, by some with disgust, by others with appreciation of what was probably a capital joke of its kind. To put it baldly, the joke lay in the production by Lewis, in the course of a spoken epilogue to Reynolds's play, *How to grow Rich*, of a lady's dress-pad, or, as we should now call it, “dress-improver,” from under his coat ! Whatever the opinion of the incident of stage historians of a later day, to it alone was ascribed the huge

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success of the play, for the author's share of the profits amounted to £620 !

An interesting account of Harris's reception of Mr. Boaden is to be found in the latter's "Life of Kemble." The gist of it is as follows : Boaden had dramatized a work by Mrs. Radcliffe, an authoress of the famous "Castle of Otranto" school, which he submitted to Harris, to whom he was personally unknown.

"It is now," he says, writing after Harris's death, "with a mournful pleasure that I recall the interview I had with that gentleman in the library of his house at Knightsbridge—the smile with which he announced his acceptance of the play and the peculiar glance he turned upon me when he proceeded to end [the play] of some obvious encumbrances to the action, and enforced the duties of compression, or omission, all which he said long experience rather than critical study had discovered to him. There was a benevolence and paternity in his manner that won my entire confidence. . . . By steady encouragement of such talent as there was, punctual and even liberal payment, constant vigilance and foresight, he stood successfully against the greatest variety of talent ever seen combined into one dramatic company." *

During the 1793 season, in one of O'Keeffe's

* Boaden here doubtless refers to the Siddons-Kemble-Sheridan combination at Drury Lane.

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numerous after-pieces, entitled *Sprigs of Laurel*, Johnstone and Incledon sang a variant of "their favourite dialogue-duet 'Sally in our Alley,'" to which O'Keeffe wrote new words.

The first novelty of the 1793-4 season was the *début* of Miss Poole at Covent Garden as Ophelia. She was afterwards known as Mrs. Dickons, and won a fine reputation as a singer both in opera and oratorio.

On February 5, Holcroft's comedy, *Love's Fraillties*, was produced, and on the 22nd an opera by Bate Dudley and Shield, of which Boaden observes that it was as successful as anything of that sort can be, "good music and good scenery operating upon inoffensive matter." On March 25 the worthy Mr. Boaden's maiden effort, *Fontainville Forest*, was duly produced. The author gives an amusing account of his tussle with Harris to render a certain ghost in the third act more realistic and ghostlike. Genest's comment on the play runs thus: "The last scene of the third act is rendered contemptible by the introduction of a phantom."

On April 10 an operatic farce, *Netley Abbey*, libretto by Pearce, and music composed by Shield, Arne, Baumgarten, Parke, and Paesiello, was produced. In this piece, Fawcett, afterwards stage-manager at Covent Garden for many years, had a sea-song, "Blue Peter," the

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music by Shield, which was loudly encored. Mrs. Martyr sang as a Sailor-boy in the song "Yo, heave ho," and Incledon sang the old song, "On board the *Arethusa*."

The last novelties of the season were *The Siege of Meaux*, a tragedy by Pye, the poet laureate, and *The Sicilian Romance* of Mrs. Radcliffe, dramatized by Mr. Henry Siddons, the son of the great actress, and, as the ruthless pen of Genest testifies, "dramatized most vilely."

On the death of Dr. Cooke, the Westminster Abbey organist, on September 14, 1793, this ancient and honourable post was offered to Dr. Arnold, who had for twenty-eight years been connected with Covent Garden Theatre as the composer of an almost endless number of ballets and operas. It is said that he accepted it with some reluctance, owing to his numerous professional engagements; but finally he accepted on the condition that he might provide a deputy whenever he was unable to attend personally.

1794-5. On September 24 Mrs. Davenport made her *début* on the English stage at Covent Garden in *She Stoops to Conquer*, starting successfully a career which lasted many years.

On January 31 a "Dramatic Tale," entitled *The Mysteries of the Castle*, by Andrews and Reynolds, with music by Shield, was produced.



DR. SAMUEL ARNOLD.
From the Painting by T. Hardy.

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During this season C. F. Baumgarten, who had been leader of the band for many years, left, and was succeeded by Mountain.

On February 29, John Ashley, a famous bassoon player of the day, assumed control of the Lenten oratorios, which thenceforth gradually "lost their character," and became little more than musical variety entertainments. These performances, originated by Handel, and while still controlled by Smith and Arnold, his successors, and by Knyvett and Harrison, were, correctly enough, styled "oratorios," *i.e.* they consisted of an entire oratorio or musical drama. Under Ashley's management this form of entertainment was changed, and the performances (with a few exceptions, notably *The Creation*) were made up of selections including every class of music, sacred and secular. In the first season, however, Ashley made no such experiments, but followed in the legitimate footsteps of his predecessors.

There is another story of Harris, senior, told in Parke's "Memoirs," which shows that, whatever else he was, he was certainly not a musician. He had objected strongly to a certain song of Paesiello's, which Mrs. Mountain, one of his company, and a favourite singer, wished to introduce. He told her to bring another to the next rehearsal. Her husband, however, was leader of the orchestra, and they arranged to have the same

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song played a note higher, giving it a more sprightly character. Mr. Harris, not recognizing it in its new key, appeared to be pleased, and said, "Aye, that's the thing; it's worth ten of the other." Mrs. Mountain, however, in her elation, was foolish enough to brag of the way she had bamboozled the manager. The story reached the latter's ears, with the result that Mountain and his wife were dismissed from the theatre.

The old Covent Garden favourite, Farren,* died during the season, and a further link was forged between the great Church musical interests and the stage by the acceptance in March, 1796, of the organistship of St. Paul's Cathedral by Thomas Attwood, then only twenty-eight years of age, whose musical farce, *The Poor Sailor*, had been produced on May 29, 1795. He had been, ten years before, a pupil of Mozart, who expressed great appreciation of his talents.

1795-6. During this season an addition to the company must be noticed, viz. that of Mrs. Knight, formerly Margaret Farren, a sister of the delightful actress who became Countess of Derby.

The season was also rendered notable by the production at Drury Lane of the famous or notorious Shakespearian forgery of *Fortigern*, a play for which it is said both Harris and Sheridan contended for the honour of producing. A very

* William Farren (the first), 1725—1795.

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successful farce, *Lock and Key*, by the most popular writer of the day, Prince Hoare, also made a hit. The music was by the ever-popular Shield, and included an overture by William Parke the oboist.

Among the new performers engaged by Harris this season was Mrs. Serres, who, though her voice was not a remarkable one, succeeded later in drawing public attention to herself by assuming the title of Princess of Cumberland, and affirming that she was the legitimate daughter of his late Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland!

1796-7. During the summer Mr. Harris, ever prodigal where the slightest improvement might be effected, had made great changes in the entrances of the house. Boaden says—

“It’s grand saloon, ‘a name without a thing,’ . . . was converted into a coffee-room; what once held the celebrated Beefsteak Club was to produce comfort of a thinner kind. Seven rows of seats were added to eleven of the centre boxes of the second and third tiers in order to admit 144 more persons nightly and increase the possible receipts by £43.”

Elliston made his first appearance at Covent Garden this season on September 21 as Sheva, the Jew in Cumberland’s play of that name. On

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November 19 one of Shield's operas, *Abroad and at Home*, met with some success. On January 10, 1797, Morton's famous comedy, *A Cure for the Heart Ache*, was produced, during the run of which Mrs. Pope, formerly Miss Younge, died at the early age of fifty-two. Boaden relates a pretty story of her in connection with Garrick's farewell performance of *King Lear*, on which occasion she acted Cordelia.

“Her hand, as it is usual, was fast locked in his at the dropping of the curtain. He led her thus into the Green Room, and exclaimed, with a sigh, ‘Ah, Bess, this is the last time of *my* being your father! . . .’ ‘Why, then, sir,’ exclaimed Miss Younge, ‘give me a father’s blessing.’ And she threw herself gracefully on her knees before him. Garrick replied, with great energy, ‘God bless you!’ Then, raising his eyes to the rest of the performers, he solemnly added, ‘And may God bless you all!’”

The oratorios commenced at Covent Garden on March 3, 1797, the performers including Madame Mara, Miss Poole, Messrs. Kelly, Bartleman, Braham, and Signora Galli, who at the age of seventy-five sang the air, “He was despised,” originally composed for her by Handel, and which she sang when *The Messiah* was first performed, in 1742. The old lady

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(says William Parke) "acquitted herself better than could have been expected, and the audience dealt her out a flattering portion of applause." At the end of the first part Mr. C. Ashley played a concerto on the violoncello, and Parke on the oboe, in which was introduced "Auld Robin Gray," which is not, as is generally thought, an ancient Scottish tune, but was written and composed by Lady Caroline Fordyce in modern times.

The big event of the '97 season was the benefit, on June 14, for the widows and orphans of the men who fell in action at Cape St. Vincent on February 14, 1797, under Sir John Jervis. The bill consisted of *The Country Girl*, *Peggy's Love*, *No Song no Supper*, and a grand ballet called *Cupid and Psyche*. On the historic occasion the Covent Garden company were reinforced by Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Jordan, Signor Storache, and the whole *corps de ballet*, under Louis d'Egville, from the Opera.

In the year 1797 Shield again resigned his post as musical director of Covent Garden Theatre, owing to a difference between himself and Mr. Harris; and although he still occasionally worked for his old employers, the long series of sparkling and successful compositions now came to an end.

The winter season of 1797-8 found Mrs.

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Abington still playing youthful heroines, in spite of her age and increasing stoutness ; but the manager, ever on the look-out for promising *débutantes*, introduced some new blood into his company in the persons of Miss Betterton, afterwards Mrs. Glover, and Mrs. Spencer, afterwards the second Mrs. Pope. On October 14, 1797, the news of the defeat of the Dutch fleet at Camperdown, two days previously, was published in the *Times*, and in the same issue of the paper an announcement was published by the managers of Covent Garden Theatre to the effect that “in the course of the entertainment will be introduced an additional scene, representing the glorious defeat of the Dutch fleet by Admiral Duncan.” On October 23 the distinguished actress, Mrs. Crawford, also now getting into years, returned to Covent Garden after a long absence. On October 25 Madame Mara, who was engaged for twelve nights at enormous terms, appeared as Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera*. Incledon was the Macheath, and Mrs. Martyr played Lucy. Cumberland, who had taken Reynolds’s place as dramatic writer-in-ordinary to the theatre, produced a new play, *False Impressions*, on November 23. Early in 1798 Morton scored a success with *Secrets Worth Knowing* ; and later on Holcroft brought forth a successful

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play, *Knave or Not*. On December 12 the famous and ever-delightful comedy of *The Heir-at-Law*, which had been brought out by Colman the younger during the summer at the Haymarket, was transferred to Covent Garden with a very strong cast, being as nearly as possible the same as that of the original production. It was as follows :—

Dr. Pangloss	Fawcett *	
Daniel Dowlas	Quick	(Suett)
Dick Dowlas	Knight	(Palmer)
Zekiel Homespun	Munden *	
Henry Moreland	Toms	(C. Kemble)
Stedfast	Murray	(Aikin)
Kenrick	Johnstone *	
Cecily Homespun	Mrs. Gibbs *	
Deborah Dowlas	Mrs. Davenport *	
Caroline Dormer	Miss Mansel	(Miss de Camp, afterwards Mrs. Charles Kemble)

“Whatever doubts,” says Boaden, “might exist as to the merits of other plays by Colman junior, not the slightest was ever heard about *The Heir-at-Law*. It was one of the gayest among modern comedies, . . . so rich in manners, so whimsical in situation, so broad in humour, that it was received as a *chef d’œuvre* by every order of critic.”

The Lenten performances opened at Covent Garden on February 22 with *The Messiah*.

* Original creators of the part, the bracketed names being those replaced by others.

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Mara that night sang the introductory recitative and air for the first time. At the end of the second part Dussek performed a concerto on the pianoforte. Parke, in his "Memoirs," relates a characteristic anecdote of the celebrated pianist. Parke had formed a party of friends to dine at the Ship Tavern, Greenwich.

"While we were at dinner a waiter came and laid a cloth for one person on the next table, and when we had dined and were taking our wine and fruit, he placed the dishes on it, which consisted of a dish of boiled eels, one of fried flounders, a boiled fowl, a dish of veal cutlets, and a couple of tarts. I had scarcely said, 'That's pretty well for one person,' when in came Dussek, who, after a 'How d'ye do,' sat down to it. He was indeed some time to his repast; but if he was slow he was sure, for in half an hour he had cleared all the dishes, leaving, with the exception of the bones, 'not a wrack behind.'"

On March 31, 1798, *The School for Scandal* was first acted at Covent Garden, by permission, for Lewis's benefit, and the afterpiece was a "Musical Interlude," by Cross, entitled *The Raft*, intended to ridicule Bonaparte's famous scheme to invade England by an army who were to cross the Channel on rafts. At the end of the season Mrs. Crawford retired from the stage,

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after nearly forty years on it; and Quick, who had played at Covent Garden off and on since 1767, had a disagreement with Harris over the terms of his engagement, and left the company.

During the year, O'Keeffe, who had been responsible for so many excellent farces and librettos, published a collected edition of his works, in which he admits his indebtedness to the kindness of Mr. Harris in permitting him to print several of his pieces of which he (Harris) had bought the copyright.

On September 21, 1798, a famous old actor in the person of John Emery made his first bow to a London audience at Covent Garden, in the character of Frank Oatland in *A Cure for the Heartache*, and although this talented actor died at the distressingly early age of forty-five, it is interesting to know that twenty years out of his brief career were spent on the boards of the historic theatre. Not the least of his claims on our attention lies in the fact that he is the grandfather of Winifred Emery, who thus worthily carries on her hereditary genius.

The musical farce entitled *The Farmer* was apparently the last for some nine years at Covent Garden with which William Shield's great talents were associated, as almost the first musical piece at the beginning of the autumn season of 1798-9, *Ramah Droog*, was given to

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Mazzinghi, who had to call Reeve to his assistance, being diffident as to his own comic powers.

Boaden, at the commencement of the 1798-9 season, speaks of T. Dibdin as the author of "a pantomimic entertainment of song, dance, and dialogue, at Covent Garden, on October 25, to celebrate the glorious victory of the Nile."

This was the first Covent Garden production of Thomas Dibdin, at that time about twenty-seven years of age, son of the great Charles Dibdin, and, through his mother, who was the daughter of Mrs. Pitt, the original Deborah Woodcock in *Love in a Village*, already connected hereditarily with Covent Garden Theatre. He had already got a piece "on the stocks" for Harris when the news of Nelson's glorious victory arrived. Like all the members of his talented family, he was a rapid worker. When the commission for the piece arrived he was at the Tunbridge Wells Theatre.

"Delighted, alarmed, and very glad that as the letter arrived on Friday, and there being no post on Saturday, I might very well take till Sunday night's post to write my piece. I went, *con amore*, to work, finished *The Mouth of the Nile* in due time for post, divided it into several parcels, each of which was franked by different patrons, in such overweight parcels that the postage cost twenty-five shillings; and on

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Tuesday morning received Mr. Harris's reply [accepting the piece]."

There was still, however, the dreaded ordeal of reading it to the company in the green room, and giving to each the part which had been allotted to him. Dibdin's highly interesting account of the ceremony is entertaining enough. All passed off satisfactorily, and the parts were all accepted with one exception, that of "Irish Johnstone," who absolutely declined his, which Lewis, who was present, prevailed on Dibdin to play himself. The next day, on calling at the theatre for letters, he learned that the management were placed in a difficulty by the sudden death of one of the actors. Would he take the place in the cast of another play there and then to oblige Mr. Harris? On his reluctantly assenting, he found himself hustled into a dressing-room, looking at the part, of which he fortunately knew something, and in an hour and a half "was seated at a supper-table before the audience of great grand Covent Garden Theatre, and helping Mrs. Davenport to the wing of a supposed poll-parrot!"

His talents were speedily recognized, and a salary of £5 a week given him. *The Mouth of the Nile* was a great success, and was played thirty-five times that season, earning the honour of a command night by the King.

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It is not mentioned at all by Genest on the 25th, but, curiously enough, he gives it on November 6 as being played for the sixth time.

On November 23 T. Dibdin also brought out a successful farce, *The Jew and the Doctor*, the first of many such. On November 12 *Ramah Droog* (*q.v.*), an opera by Cobb, the music by Reeve and Mazzinghi, was produced, and long remained popular. During the last rehearsal Parke, the oboist, relates a story of a quarrel he had with Irish Johnstone in the presence of Ware, the leader of the orchestra, and others. After it was over he had occasion to use his handkerchief, which caused Lewis, the harlequin, to remark that "he saw he was determined to have the last blow." Boaden speaks of "a series of scenes for it painted by Richard (*q.v.*), from the exquisite designs of Daniel, made, as everybody knows, by him in India."

It is impossible to disavow sympathy with Boaden's lament over the neglect that British dramatists' original serious work suffered at this time. Kotzebue was the source of almost all the inspiration, or, if not Kotzebue, Molière was drawn upon. So seldom was it that an original tragedy by a native dramatist received the honour of a representation.

The oratorios commenced as usual with *The*

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Messiah, on February 18, 1799. Parke tells us that—

“Mara, by her style of singing, proved that she had no equal in Handel’s music. Miss Poole sang ‘Rejoice’ with correctness and brilliancy; it was encored, as well as the ‘Hallelujah Chorus,’ enthusiastically. At the end of the first act (*sic*) I played a concerto on the oboe, and Jarnovicki performed a concerto on the violin at the end of the second act.”

The last appearance of Mrs. Abington was made on April 12, 1799, in Kotzebue’s *Count of Burgundy*, and as Lady Racket in *Three Weeks after Marriage*. Mrs. Abington was, I believe, one of the greatest and most versatile actresses that ever adorned the boards of the English stage. She had a good figure, and her expression was animated and vivacious. Added to these, she possessed the remarkable intelligence without which no actress, however beautiful, can hope to long retain the regard of the public. Genest says that in certain parts, Lady Teazle, Beatrice, etc., “none ever equalled her, while her range of power extended from the representation of the accomplished and well-bred woman of fashion to The Country Girl, The Romp, The Hoyden, and The Chambermaid.”

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The 1799–1800 season opened on September 16, after another extensive redecorating of the great theatre.

On September 18 Mrs. Dibdin, wife of the new recruit to Harris's band of actors and authors, made her *début* as Aura in the comedy of *The Farmhouse*, and commenced an engagement which lasted ten years, and was only terminated at her own wish.

During the winter more than one English adaptation of the fashionable Kotzebue, by Mrs. Inchbald and others, were seen, among them *Joanna*, which Cumberland had adapted, and in its author's opinion so badly, that he "thought it worth his while to publicly disclaim everything in it that was offensive." The music to it was composed by Dr. Busby, a former pupil of Battishill's, who was at this time organist of the church of St. Mary Woolnoth in Lombard Street. He had previously had some little experience of composing for the theatre, and had, besides, written an oratorio entitled *Britannia*, first performed at Covent Garden for the benefit of the Royal Humane Society. Although lavish expense had been incurred in producing *Joanna*, it was not a success.

February 8, 1800, saw the first production on any stage of Morton's famous comedy of *Speed the Plough*. The plot is of the type that,

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almost without exception, prevailed at the day it was written, in which the action of the play hinges upon seduction and adultery, followed by duels and bloodshed. Curiously enough, it is even now commemorated in the mention of the fictitious character of "Mrs. Grundy." This personage does not, however, appear in the play, but she is mentioned several times by one of the characters in the words, "What will Mrs. Grundy say?"

The performances of sacred music commenced this year on Friday, February 28. Parke's account is as follows: "The first [night] was a selection in which Mrs. Second's rich voice in 'Sweet Bird' was as mellifluous as the nightly warbler she invoked. The fine chorus, the 'Hallelujah,' was rapturously encored."

The season was rendered memorable by the fact that Haydn's oratorio of *The Creation* was performed for the first time in England on Friday, March 28. The circumstances attending the composition of the famous work are as follows:—

It had been heard for the first time at the Schwarzenberg Palace, Vienna, in 1798. The score was brought to this country by a king's messenger from Vienna on Saturday, March 22, at 9 p.m. It was copied into parts by Mr. Thomas Goodwin, for 120 performers, rehearsed,

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and performed at Covent Garden Theatre on the Friday following, under the direction of Mr. J. Ashley, who was then managing the oratorios. When Mr. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, complimented the industrious band of copyists upon their extraordinary achievement, the chief copyist replied, "Sir, we have humbly emulated a great example. It is not the first time that the Creation has been completed in six days."

Parke informs us that "it was received with great applause, particularly the first act of it, in which the sublime chorus, 'The heavens are telling,' excited the admiration of the whole audience." Mr. J. S. Shedlock has kindly furnished me with the following particulars, copied from the *Times*, March 28, 1800:—

"Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. This evening for the first time. *The Creation*. Composed by Dr. Haydn. Principal Vocal Performers: Mrs. Second, Master Elliot, Miss Capper, Miss Tennant, Miss Crosby, Mr. Inledon, Mr. Dignum, Mr. Denman, and Mr. Sale. Leader of the Band, Mr. G. Ashley. Organ, Mr. J. Ashley. The whole under the direction of Mr. Ashley, senior."

It is interesting to note that Thomas Goodwin, the theatre copyist above named, is the founder of the firm of well-known copyists still

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in existence at the present day, known to all musical people as Goodwin and Tabb. Dibdin records the fact of Moorhead the composer, who became insane, "striking Goodwin on the temple with a large rummer glass and nearly killing him."

During the last season of the old eighteenth century the following new operas and pantomimes first saw the light at Covent Garden: *The Magic Oak*, a pantomime, and *The Old Clothesman*, a "musical entertainment," by Thomas Attwood; also *The Turnpike Gate*, by Reeve and Mazzinghi. On May 1 *Paul and Virginia*, an opera written by Cobb, and also composed by Mazzinghi and Reeve, scored some success. In this piece Incledon had two songs, one with an oboe obbligato by Parke, which was received with great enthusiasm.

O'Keeffe, who had had so many highly successful pieces produced during the previous twenty years, had a benefit night on June 12, 1800, which realized £360. Mrs. Jordan, from Drury Lane, again lent the power of her fascinating presence to the programme, as she did on the following night for the benefit of "Bayswater Hospital."

During the latter part of the season trouble had been simmering in the theatre between the proprietors and some of the principal actors over

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certain ordinances enforced by Harris respecting the orders or passes allowed them for their friends, the cost of their benefit nights, and the fines for refusing a character. The matter was submitted, by consent of the parties, to the arbitration of the then Lord Chamberlain, the Marquis of Salisbury, who in a well-worded, reasonable judgment practically decided against the actors and for the proprietors.

Dibdin tells us he—

“had not long been attached to Covent Garden Theatre before I was elected member of the Covent Garden Theatre Beefsteak Club; why so called, I don’t know, as we never used to eat beefsteaks there—at least I never saw one on the table. It was a most agreeable society, consisting of the principal actors, and every dramatic author connected with the theatre, as well as several eminent commercial and legal gentlemen.”

Dibdin also relates an amusing anecdote of Mrs. Inchbald, connected with his musical piece, *The Naval Pillar*, produced on October 7, 1799. The principal character in the piece was a Quaker, acted by Munden. On the first night he was introduced to the fair Mrs. Inchbald in Lewis’s box at the theatre by Lewis himself, who shortly after left the two dramatists together. After a time the lady, observing the laughter created by Munden, suddenly turned

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to Dibdin and asked whether it would be of material consequence to the play if he were to omit the part from the play altogether. The astonished author feebly replied that he regarded the part as of very material consequence, whereupon Mrs. Inchbald replied, "It was very unfortunate," and soon after left the box. The explanation of the incident came from Lewis, who returned to inform him that his fair rival was about to bring out a comedy called *The Wise Men of the East*, in which were a family of Quakers. She was, it seems, apprehensive of a charge of plagiarism, and took this novel if somewhat audacious method of essaying to remove the cause of the trouble. But it is satisfactory to record that her own play was also quite successful.

The autumn season of 1800 was signalized by the appearance at Covent Garden of George Cooke, an actor, says Boaden, who in some characters at least was thought, and justly thought, superior to Kemble himself. Cooke was an extraordinary individual in many respects, and had Harris foreseen the complications that were to ensue upon his advent, it is doubtful whether he could have congratulated himself upon his new recruit. While his figure was a manly one, his gait and gesture were, it appears, awkward. He had a curious trick of using, as

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we should say to-day, two “productions” in his speaking voice, one of which was harsh and acrimonious, the other mild and caressing. “He used the first to control or convince—the second to soothe or betray.” He played many parts exceedingly well, a few superlatively so; but he was a man of violent passions and ungovernable temper, which before the end of his first London season showed itself to the Covent Garden audience without an attempt at restraint.

The last day of October was the occasion of his *début* in the part of King Richard the Third. Harris attended every rehearsal, and seemed to be highly pleased with Cooke. He more than once asked him whether he had not formed himself upon Garrick, to which Cooke answered that he had never seen Garrick in his life.

Dibdin, who was a good friend to Cooke, relates a story of his walking from Covent Garden with him one November evening to Dibdin’s lodgings in Goodge Street, where Cooke drank more than he could carry, and after sitting up the whole night with his host, left, accompanied by Dibdin, to go to Martlett Court, Bow Street, where he was lodging. After innumerable halts to tell long stories, he threatened to smash the windows of an unfortunate coachbuilder (whose newly painted shop front he had brushed against), an act he was with difficulty restrained from.

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In Soho Square he stopped, and with "thundering emphasis uttered the interjection, 'Hah!' 'There,' said Cooke, 'tell Harris what my voice effected, after a hard drinking bout, at seven in the morning in Soho Square!'" This Dibdin promised to do. "Will you, though," said Cooke, "be such an enemy to your old friend? 'What business,' Harris will say, 'had Cooke in Soho Square at seven in the morning?'" And so Dibdin had to vary his tactics and soothe the ruffled feelings of a tipsy man as best he might.

Harris, however, showed him unusual favour. On the occasion of his benefit, January 27, 1801, a time of the season that usually found the theatre full, Cooke acted in *The Stranger*, a Drury Lane piece which had not before been performed at Covent Garden, and the manager actually handed over to him the £160 generally retained out of the gross receipts as expenses. He therefore netted a sum of about £550.

Among the new plays produced this season were Colman's *Poor Gentleman*, an amusing farce which met with great success, and Fawcett's "historical pantomime" of *La Perouse*, founded on a play by Kotzebue.

The oratorio season commenced on Friday, February 29, with Mozart's *Requiem* and Handel's *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*. Parke criticises the

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former severely for its dulness, from which he says—

“The audience were happily relieved by Incledon’s song in *L’Allegro*, ‘Haste thee, nymph,’ which he gave with such inimitable and contagious effect that his jocund laugh seized a considerable portion of the audience, who heartily joined in it.”

During the year 1801 “the managers of Covent Garden Theatre engaged the composer William Russell to preside at the pianoforte there, for the express purpose, as they stated to him, of accompanying Mrs. Billington, Storace, and Braham.” *

Russell was at this time a young man twenty-four years old, who had filled the position of organist at several City churches. He had commenced the practice of his profession at the age of twelve, as deputy for his father, the organist of St. Mary Aldermary, Bow Lane. Almost concurrently with his appointment at Covent Garden he was unanimously elected organist of the Foundling Hospital, which may certainly be reckoned among the “blue ribbons” of the craft. His theatrical experience had been limited to a brief connection with Sadlers Wells Theatre as “pianoforte player and composer,” in which

* “Musical Biography,” vol. ii. p. 283.

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position he was succeeded by William Reeve, who had purchased an interest in the concern and therefore severed his connection with Covent Garden.

The beginning of the autumn season 1801 was not auspicious, for, owing to Cooke absenting himself without warning on September 14, the opening night, the bill had to be changed at the last minute—a proceeding which so irritated the despots of the pit and gallery that they resorted to the usual riot before allowing the play to proceed. The company was a strong one, including, as it did, Signora Anna Storace (*q.v.*), the famous Drury Lane soprano, who must then have been in the very prime of her powers. She was about thirty-four years of age, and was the daughter of Stefano Storace, an eminent Italian contrabassist, who had settled in London, where, in fact, his more famous children, Anna and Stephen, were both born. She had first appeared at the Haymarket Theatre as a child prodigy, and was later on sent to study in Italy, under the finest masters of the day. Her father reaped his reward by seeing her acclaimed from London to Vienna as the principal soprano of her time. Her seasons at Vienna included the ever-memorable event of May 1, 1786, when she created the part of Susanna in Mozart's *Nozze de Figaro*. Mrs. Billington, the second great

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artist at Covent Garden, had concluded an arrangement with the two patent theatres extremely advantageous to herself, by which she was to sing at each theatre alternately throughout the season, until April, and for which she was to receive the sum of £2000 from each treasury.

Parke's account puts her salary at "3000 guineas to perform three times a week, a free benefit insured at £500, and £500 more to her brother, Mr. Weichsell, for leading the band on the nights she performed." Whatever the salary was, it was evidently extremely satisfactory to the lady, and she made her first reappearance after a lapse of seven years at Covent Garden Theatre on October 3, as Mandane in *Artaxerxes*. Mr. Parke considers that her sojourn in Italy had improved her powers. The famous air, "The Soldier tired," was tumultuously encored. In the third act "she introduced with extraordinary effect a bravura, accompanied by Mr. Weichsell on the violin," with great success.

The last of the trio of great artists whose appearance lent such exceptional lustre to the theatre was John Braham, who returned to the scene of his boyish triumph fourteen years before, and appeared as Alla Bensalla in an opera called *Chains of the Heart ; or, The Slave by Choice*, composed by Mazzinghi and Reeve

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to a libretto by Hoare. He was now in his twenty-seventh year,* and had established his reputation as the first English tenor of his day. In addition to this, he was an accomplished musician. His early vocal training he owed in a great measure to the liberality of Rauzzini, who had received him into his house and given him lessons for three years free of charge. Later on he visited Paris, Florence, Milan, and Genoa, and other Italian cities, in each place studying under the best masters, and performing in public wherever opportunity offered. He had not, however, at this date evinced those talents as a composer of songs by which his name is now rendered famous. On his return from Italy, we are told, he showed greatly improved powers, but the new style he had adopted was not generally relished, owing to the profuse embellishment he threw into even the simplest airs.

Harris commissioned Dibdin to write a new three-act opera for these three distinguished artists, giving him a month to do it in. The author set to work, and in nineteen days delivered his MS. of *The Cabinet*. A slight coolness arose between Harris and Dibdin, owing to the fact that the opera was not immediately produced. It turned out that Braham and Storace had made up their minds to appear first

* Grove.

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in an opera by Prince Hoare, and Harris could not alter their resolution, which was therefore carried into effect. Later on, however, Dibdin and Mr. Harris came to an amicable arrangement on the matter, and it was duly produced. It should be noted that in this opera Braham himself wrote the music for his own part—a custom to which he continued for several years to adhere.*

On October 8, 1801, Henry Siddons (*q.v.*), son of the great actress, made his first appearance as an actor in London at Covent Garden. In spite of his parentage, or perhaps in consequence of it, and the weight his name bore, he never became more than a mediocre actor.

On October 14 an operetta entitled *The Escapes*, a libretto by Holcroft, set to music from Cherubini, selected and arranged by Attwood, was first performed, and met with success.

On December 26 another disgraceful riot took place in the theatre during the performance of *Richard III.* It seems to have originated in a drunken freak by some ruffian in the two-shilling gallery, who actually threw a quart bottle at an actor named Betterton, grazing his hat. Despite the indignation of the better part of the audience and the arrest of the miscreant, the uproar was continued on various pretexts,

* Grove.

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completely stopping the play until the box-keeper, John Brandon, "at the head of about five guardsmen with their bayonets fixed, suddenly appeared in the gallery. The glittering steel had an excellent effect upon the wretched mob, who slunk in haste from the theatre, then almost in darkness."*

From another paragraph in Boaden we learn incidentally the names of the three scene painters to the theatre, Messrs. Hollogan, Whitmore, and Cresswell, who painted some fine scenery for one of Dibdin's pantomimes, called *Harlequin's Almanack*; or, *The Four Seasons*.

On February 9,† 1802, the opera by T. Dibdin, to which we have previously referred, made its appearance, and scored an immediate success, and we have it on Boaden's authority that no less than six musicians collaborated in the music, viz. Rauzzini, Reeve, Moorehead, Davie, Corri, and Braham.

"The most admired pieces were Braham's first ballad, 'My Beautiful Maid,' and the polacca, 'No more by Sorrow' (which were both encored), Signora Storace's air, 'The Bird that sings,' and the hunting song sung by Incedon, in giving which his fine volume of voice filled the whole theatre."‡

* Boaden's "Kemble," vol. ii. p. 309.

† Parke says the 19th.

‡ Parke.

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Dibdin informs us that for *The Cabinet* he received payment in all amounting to about £700.

“I gave great offence to the retail vendors of the song-books in the theatre, by publishing the words of the songs at 10*d.* each book. The songs of a first opera had always been printed at one shilling, but the fruit-women, who scorn to take less than silver, expect an advance, so that a gentleman would be compelled to give eighteenpence, which I always considered a shameful imposition, and which I was the first to remedy, as by printing them at 10*d.* they were sold at a shilling, which could not be refused . . . and yet for many nights they refused to sell the songs at all, because they were not allowed to tax the public in their usual way. My plan has been ever since adopted in all the theatres.”

Mrs. Siddons appeared for her son's benefit on May 21, and on June 26 the season ended.

From the year 1802 dated the arrangement by which Mr. Harris took over the active management of the theatre, when a lease of the shares of the other proprietors, which had been taken for twenty-one years by him, had expired.* In consideration of this, the sum of £1000 per

* *Vide* Appendix to the Case of the Respondents, Chas. Kemble, J. S. Willett, and John Forbes, in the Appeal to the House of Lords by Henry Harris (*circa* 1829).

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annum was agreed upon to be paid him, out of the theatre treasury. Later, about the year 1810, his son Henry retired from his profession, and devoted his time to assisting his father in the management.

During the summer of 1802 the long series of disputes between Kemble and Sheridan ended by Kemble and Mrs. Siddons shaking the dust of Drury Lane Theatre from their feet, and betaking themselves, the one for a long rest to the Continent, the other over to Ireland.

At Covent Garden, in the early part of the autumn season, Cooke attempted to play Hamlet, a character that did not suit him, a fact he speedily became aware of. Holcroft produced a melodrame, as it was called, entitled *A Tale of Mystery*, described by Genest as "a mixture of dialogue and dumb show," and to which Dr. Busby* wrote some music. This was the first occasion, so theatrical historians agree, that the word "melodrame" was heard in England to describe an English play. According to Boaden (vol. ii. p. 332), a contemporary critic thus describes its meaning: "A melo-drame is an opera in prose, which is merely spoken, and in which music discharges the duty of a *valet de chambre*, because her office is simply to announce the actors."

* Author of "A General History of Music."

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On December 18 a comic opera entitled *Family Quarrels*, by Dibdin, appeared with Braham in it. Apparently the performance created a disturbance, owing to the fact that a fancied slight to the Jews was detected in the acting of one of the characters. Dibdin says of it himself—

“If I encountered a few difficulties during the rehearsals of *The Cabinet* . . . they were doubled and trebled in the present instance, so as almost to make me despair . . . of bringing it before the public in any shape at all. Yet to have withdrawn it, would have been to sacrifice above half my year’s income, when I had not only my own immediate family, but nearly three hundred a year’s worth of relations to support; and to have offended my second father (as I shall ever consider Mr. Harris) and injure all my future interests. Sufficient to say, I wrote three and twenty different songs, etc., in exchange for those which were first intended, each requiring some trifling alteration in the drama by way of introduction, and each alteration diverging a line or two from the construction of my fable. Mr. Fawcett . . . suggested I should write him a song, something in the style of my father’s comic ballad, ‘The Ladies,’ and that my ladies should all be beauties of the Jewish persuasion. Heaven knows that I . . . never entertained . . . the ‘minutest atom of an idea’ that the harmless joke could be taken as the most distant intention

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of giving offence. God help me, if all the attorneys I have publicly laughed at, and (as I hope to prosper) mean to laugh at again, should think proper to rise in a body and . . . crush me . . . The enemy came, however, in great force . . . before the first song a predetermination of opposition was evident . . . till the appearance of Fawcett in his Jewish gabardine proved the chosen moment for commencing an uproar, which but for the subsequent O.P. Row, of noisy memory, would never have been equalled."

To cut a long story short, the song about which so much was made by some rather thin-skinned Hebrews, and which was merely good-natured chaff, was omitted on the second night of performance, and the row was not renewed.

In the Lenten oratorios this season Miss Parke (afterwards Mrs. Beardmore) sang in place of Mrs. Billington, who was absent from protracted illness.

On March 5, 1803, a highly successful play by the younger Colman, entitled *John Bull*, was produced. Cooke, in his "Memoirs," relates the difficulty that Harris had in getting the manuscript of the last act from its author. Finally he stopped supplies of cash, which brought Colman to his senses, and he wrote the act "one night on separate pieces of paper, throwing them on the floor as he completed them, and then, finishing his liquor, went to bed, where

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Fawcett, sent by Harris, found him, and picking up the scraps, brought them to the theatre."

The season closed on June 24 with a benefit for Lee Lewis, who had not acted there for nineteen years, and in which he appeared, together with the ever good-natured Mrs. Jordan and Mrs. Mattocks. Two mornings later the poor *bénéficiaire* was found dead in his bed.

Mrs. Pope, who had been so great an ornament to the stage, also expired this month of an apoplectic fit.

According to Boaden, Harris cleared £30,000 by this season alone; but it must not be forgotten that he had many claims made upon him by the, alas! too-often improvident folk in his company, many of whom had no possible right to a share in his benevolence. Of these was O'Keeffe, who must, by his own showing, have received thousands of pounds from the sale of his works. He had, in 1800, been given a free benefit night by Harris, which realized over £300, and in 1803 we find him making ten unused plays into a bundle and sending them to the manager, who, through Lewis as intermediary, generously allowed him twenty guineas per annum for the remainder of his life in consideration of the right of performance. This sum was paid him half-yearly for considerably over twenty years afterwards.

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CHAPTER X

1802-1808

It is not necessary here to trace the circumstances that led to Covent Garden Theatre being managed by the most illustrious actor that has graced the English stage since the days of Garrick, as Mr. Fitzgerald, in his "Lives of the Kembles," has dealt very fully with them. It is sufficient to say that, as was the case with any one having dealings with the brilliantly gifted manager of Drury Lane, John Philip Kemble and his famous sister found it meant payment by promises instead of coin of the realm. Repeated applications simply meant repeated postponements. These led to letters and scenes, undignified and unworthy alike of both parties. All this could only end in one way, and the inevitable secession happened.

A fortunate opportunity occurred at the psychological moment by which Kemble might become one of the proprietors of Covent Garden. The whole concern, we learn, was in 1802 valued at £138,000, of which Harris represented

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one-half, the rest, of which Lewis, the stage-manager, owned one-sixth, being divided among four proprietors. It is said that Lewis's wife induced her husband to part with his share; but, be this as it may, Lewis, perhaps nervous as to the security of his investment, was willing to sell, and Kemble bought it for £23,000;* and none who are acquainted with the very human weaknesses of the ever-delightful sex can doubt that, six years later, Mrs. Lewis must have hugged to herself the flattering thought that her foresight had saved her husband from participation in the calamities that overtook the ill-fated building.

Before leaving the subject of Lewis, it is pleasant to read the appreciative description by Boaden of his old friend's daily habits and personality.

“Qualified, however, amply, by temper, manners, and judgment for a manager, Mr. Lewis sustained the toils of rehearsal in the morning, with the additional labours of his own study and performance as an actor, . . . for a period of twenty years, and standing as high at the theatre with his brethren as he did with the patentee. He kept himself in unfailing health and spirits by a daily walk between rehearsal and dinner up to Hyde Park and back

* *Vide* Appendix.

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again. For many years . . . he was as noticeable in this . . . as the Duke of Queensberry. . . . Pleasant, sensible, worthy Lewis, many a whimsical story have I heard from you on this your beaten track !”

Lewis had only held the one-sixth share for a single year at the time of Kemble’s purchase, and it is said the money was advanced by Kemble’s friend, Mr. Heathcote. The negotiations were, it is curious to read, carried on by Kemble’s intimate friend, his “Dear Muse,” as he calls her in his letters, Mrs. Inchbald, the dramatist. The entire arrangement was of the most satisfactory nature from Kemble’s point of view. First and foremost, he was to be associated with Harris instead of Sheridan. Mr. Fitzgerald calls Harris a manager of wonderful tact and success—punctual in his payments and honourable in his dealings. Kemble was to be in the position of sharing in the profits accruing to the theatre treasury from his own presence and acting. More, the arrangement included the very important proviso that Kemble was to be stage manager.* He was thus enabled to command the services of his illustrious sister, and to cast the plays to be produced himself. It

* From the Appendix previously quoted (p. 287) we learn that the salary attaching to this office had been for fifty years £200 per annum.

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is estimated that the income Kemble derived from the theatre was thus not less than £2500 a year.

The following table shows the exact proportions of the property held by Kemble and his partners :—

Thomas Harris	was	possessed	of	a	moiety,	or	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{4}$
John P. Kemble	„	„	„	„	„	„	$\frac{1}{6}$	or $\frac{4}{24}$
George White	„	„	„	„	„	„	$\frac{1}{8}$	or $\frac{3}{24}$
Ann Martindale	„	„	„	„	„	„	$\frac{1}{8}$	or $\frac{3}{24}$
Henry Harris	„	„	„	„	„	„	$\frac{1}{12}$	or $\frac{2}{24}$

Thomas and Henry Harris were, of course, father and son. Messrs. White and Martindale were respectively a clerk in the House of Commons and the proprietor of “the Subscription House in St. James’s Street.” These two gentlemen had each married a daughter of Powell (*q.v.*), a former proprietor,* who had died in 1769.

According to Boaden, still further improvements were carried out in the theatre upon the change of proprietorship, and the internal decorations altered.

“The fronts of the boxes were painted chastely dead white and gold, and their insides party-coloured green, with suitable ornaments. To show, too, what were the expectations from the fashionable world on thus transforming the seat of tragedy, sixteen private boxes were built

* Dibdin’s “Origin of the Drama,” pp. 208, 209.



JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

From the Painting by Sir T. Lawrence, engraved by W. Say.

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and let at £300 a year each, and among their proprietors were found the Duchesses of Northumberland and Devonshire, the Marchioness of Abercorn, the Earl of Egremont, Lady Holland, &c., &c., all the declared patrons and admirers of the Kemble family. The Royal Arms in the centre of the drop-curtain had been used in the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in the days of Cibber, Wilks, and Booth, and they seemed triumphantly to announce the return of theatric glory."

The vision of glory was, alas! to be short-lived. How heartbreaking it is to think that the fine old building, with all its priceless contents and historical memories, a few brief years later was to become a heap of soaking ashes in precisely six hours!

While the negotiations for his purchase of a share in the theatre were actually in process of being settled, Kemble went abroad, leaving Mrs. Inchbald, as we have seen, to conclude them. During his absence, which must apparently have been prolonged into over twelve months, Kemble visited Paris, Madrid, and Italy in the course of his travels. Not unnaturally, Mr. Fitzgerald comments on his "careless postponement of business to pleasure. He was later to dispose of his share in the concern with almost the same indifference with which he had taken it up." It

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is somewhat amusing to learn that the excellent Mr. Harris, with whom Mrs. Inchbald negotiated the transaction, had at their first acquaintance wished to be enrolled among her admirers, and signified his devotion in a rather rough fashion. She only pulled his hair violently, and thus repulsed his rude advances, and with great simplicity in her pretty, slightly hesitating speech related her adventure to the great amusement of the Green Room. "I don't know what would have become of me if he had w-w-orn a w-w-ig!" was her comment. Yet after this introduction her relations with the manager were of a most friendly and respectful character.

Upon Kemble's return to London, two dinners were given to celebrate the changes in management, one by the managers of Covent Garden to their rival, Sheridan, and one by Kemble himself, at his house in Great Russell Street, to the performers who were now to be under his command. These numbered some great ones of the theatrical world, among them Cooke, second only to Kemble, Mrs. Davenport, Mrs. Mattocks, Farley, Thomas Hull, Lewis, Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Glover, Charles Kemble, Mrs. H. Siddons, and many others of less note.

On September 24, 1803, he made his first appearance at Covent Garden in *Hamlet* to great applause. Three days later Mrs. Siddons made

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hers in *Isabella*. Mr. Fitzgerald remarks on the tact and moderation of his management. In his relations with Cooke—an undisciplined, jealous, and disorderly character—it was anticipated he would have infinite embarrassments. Not unnaturally, Cooke, who was a powerful actor when sober, expected his new manager, in theatrical parlance, to take the “fat” parts himself. But this was not Kemble’s method. Almost his first act* was to produce Sheridan’s *Pizarro*, and put his own character into Cooke’s hands. Cooke, however, spoilt his own chances by appearing before the audience drunk, and incapable of either speaking or acting. Kemble apologized, and the audience too readily forgave the wretched man, who, however, was not generous enough to appreciate his chief’s magnanimity. Cooke made matters worse by blurting out to the audience that he was suffering from “his old complaint,” at which they roared with mocking laughter, and let him retire as best he might.

A second occasion is related of Cooke’s coming to rehearsals of Kelly’s opera, *Adrian and Orrila*,† so intoxicated as to be hardly able to stand! The author then, not unnaturally, wanted Kemble to postpone the piece, but the latter insisted upon its performance, as being the least of two

* On October 17, 1803.

† Produced November 15, 1806.

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evils. Upon Mr. Harris being sent for as chief proprietor, he took Kelly's view, Cooke all the time pouring out a volley of drunken abuse of Kemble, of which he took not the least notice. Harris and Kemble were entirely at variance in their views as to what was best to be done. Harris protested that he was chief proprietor and should be obeyed, a curious contention with the very man he had placed in the position of manager. Kemble, however, persisted fiercely, and even threatened to tell the audience the real reason. Eventually Brandon, the well-known box-keeper, and who was to become famous in the days of the O.P. Riots, coaxed Cooke away to bed, wrapped wet towels round his head, woke him at five, and gave him some coffee. He was then dressed and pushed on to the stage. The lights and surroundings there seemed to revive his intelligence, and he acted the part fairly, thus justifying Kemble's firmness. Kemble, however, laid himself open to the obvious suspicion of having forced the situation in order to exhibit Cooke in a disgraceful position. This is evidently Genest's view, as he gives the following account of the position :—

“ It was at first agreed that they [Cooke and Kemble] should play subordinate characters to each other—and this Kemble did for some time ; but he gradually withdrew himself from such

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characters, while Cooke continued to be cast for parts in which he could not but appear at a disadvantage in comparison with Kemble. Cooke was a plain man, but Kemble is said to have possessed the singular faculty of persuading a person contrary to what he knew to be his own interest, and yet of doing it in such a manner as to preclude opposition."

On November 5, 1803, James Kenney's celebrated farce, *Raising the Wind*, first saw the footlights at Covent Garden. It is a play which for over a century has been produced at intervals, and has never failed to be a source of merriment and laughter, untinged by the suggestiveness and indecency which unfortunately prevent so many otherwise excellent eighteenth-century plays from being staged for the playgoers of to-day.

Among the successful productions of the season was one of Thomas Dibdin's librettos, *The English Fleet in 1342*, partly set to music by Braham, in which Braham, Incledon, and Signora Storace appeared. The greatest success in this piece was the famous duet "All's Well," sung by Braham and Incledon, which was encored. In the overture the air of "Rule Britannia" was introduced.

Apparently the piece did not at first meet with success, but Parke says that "through the skill of an able pilot, Mr. Harris, it was at length

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brought into safe anchorage, where, with flying colours, it afterwards rode triumphant." Although it may appear incredible, it is nevertheless a fact that Braham received no less than 1000 guineas for this opera. T. Dibdin, by his libretto, cleared over £600 from *The English Fleet*. The following short list of prices is taken from Parke's "Memoirs":—

Dr. Arne, in 1763, received for <i>Artaxerxes</i>	60 gns.
Wm. Shield, in 1781	„ <i>Rosina</i> £40
Mr. Storace, in 1791	„ <i>The Siege of Belgrade</i> £1000

1803–4. The oratorios at Covent Garden Theatre commenced for the Lent season on February 17, and once again had the advantage of Mrs. Billington's assistance.

The following plays appear in the list of productions in Kemble's first season: *Speed the Plough*, *Beaux Stratagem*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Every Man in his Humour*, *Richard III.*, *Douglas*, *The Stranger*, *Pizarro*, *Henry V.*, *The Heir-at-Law*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Henry IV.*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *Jane Shore*, *Henry IV.* (Part II.), *Othello*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Rivals*. What would our modern actor-managers say to producing eleven of Shakespear's heaviest plays in six months? While making every allowance for the simpler mountings permissible in Kemble's time as

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contrasted with the sumptuous productions we are accustomed to in the twentieth century, still the bare list of titles alone is sufficient to take one's breath away !

1804-5. Kemble's second season at Covent Garden was marked by the curious *furor* created by the infant prodigy known to fame as "Master Betty," or the young Roscius. The boy, at this time about thirteen years old, had been appearing in the provinces with an extraordinary success. He hailed from Belfast, and had made a triumphal progress through Ireland and Scotland and the larger towns in the north of England to London. Kemble and Harris journeyed to Leicester to see him act, and engaged him. At Covent Garden, on Saturday, December 1, 1804, he made his first appearance to a packed house in the play of *Barbarossa*, taking the character of Achmet, in which he did not appear till the second act; and such was the public impatience to see their new pet, that the first was hardly listened to. He scored an immediate success in London, a success as little creditable to the taste of a generation who had seen Garrick, and were enjoying Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, as it was mortifying to the illustrious pair themselves. Kemble mounted all the greatest plays in his *répertoire* for young Betty, plays in which the other actors were

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nearly twice the height of the hero ! There was some artificial means used to partially disguise this, but it was obviously impossible to do so with any great measure of success. He is said to have been able to represent filial affection and such passions as he could feel with considerable energy, and his action was good, but he had little or no expression in his countenance, his voice was very bad, and seems to have been a revival of the unnatural way of speaking we now call "sing-song," or a sort of musical recitative which had prevailed on the stage from about 1710 to 1740. However, in spite of all these disadvantages, the town went as mad about him as they do nowadays over young violinists. It was not merely the unthinking rage of the *oi polloi*, but that of rank and fashion (certainly quite as unthinking); politicians, statesmen, and literary and artistic London all fell at his feet. The crush in the theatre was enormous, which, let us hope, compensated Kemble somewhat during his temporary eclipse. Mrs. Inchbald describes his first appearance in her characteristic manner. While she confesses to being wearied by his monotonous tone of voice, she admits that he also exhibits great fire and spirit and an impassioned variety, adding, "This is a clever little boy, and had I never seen boys act, I might have thought him exquisite."

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There were, of course, protests made in the Press and elsewhere against the ridiculous loss of public good sense, and caricaturists took full advantage of the opportunity to satirize the stately Kembles in their unceremonious snuffing out.

Cumberland, in his description of the episode, finishes with the quiet comment that "folly could not keep possession of the public mind for ever. Master Betty persisted in acting part after part, till he had run through his period of popularity and found his true level." At the conclusion of his second season the bubble burst, says Genest, and although he continued to act successfully for a year or two longer in the provinces, and was afterwards sent to Cambridge, from thenceforth history is silent upon him. Boaden says that "amidst all the adulation, all the desperate folly [of which Betty was the object], he never lost the genuine modesty of his bearing."

Before leaving the subject, it is interesting to glance at the figures given regarding salaries and managerial profits at the time.

Betty was paid by the Covent Garden management at the rate of fifty guineas per night, and a whole clear benefit, or £150 per week; and as this engagement was neither exclusive nor continuous, but on alternate nights,

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it permitted him also to play alternately at Drury Lane, where his terms were even higher. Fitzgerald informs us that his twenty-eight nights' playing at the Lane brought Sheridan nearly £20,000 receipts.

During May, 1805, there was produced at Covent Garden what we should now term a musical comedy, entitled *The Spanish Dollars ; or, The Priest of the Parish*. One of the songs, subsequently made famous by the singing of Braham, was "The Bay of Biscay." For the following note upon it I am indebted to "Lancelot" of the *Referee*, to whose weekly column so many people look forward with interest.

"The piece was written by Andrew Cherry for the benefit of the famed tenor, Incledon. The music was supplied by John Davey, and the song is led up to with elaborate care by a dialogue between a sailor and the captain of a ship that has been wrecked off the Irish coast :

"CAPTAIN : We have escaped a bit of a squall, to be sure.'

"SAILOR : Squall !—hurricane, you mean.'

"CAPTAIN : Pooh ! a capful—nothing—a street puddle in a shower to what I have weathered. Why, there was in our last voyage from St. Helen's, I remember, in the Bay of Biscay, at the dead of a pitch-dark night, the wind blew great guns, the thunder roll'd, flash went the

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lightning, when the mainmast gave way with a tremendous crash. We clapt stops upon the cables and secured 'em by ringbolts on the deck; the cable parted—the ship hung by the stream and kedge, and drove broadside on; a wave carried away our sternboat, unshipt our rudder, and washed overboard our quarter-boards, binnacle, and round house. There we lay—our men drenched with wet, and fainting with fatigue—till Providence hush'd the winds, becalmed the seas, hove another sail in sight that took us up, and gave us strength and fortitude to proceed on our voyage. When, then, should sailors despair, since the Breath that agitates can lull the boisterous ocean?'

“Having delivered himself of this heroic tirade, the captain bursts into song with ‘The Bay of Biscay.’ When Braham detached the song from the play, he seems to have thought that something was required to make up for the loss of the captain’s preliminary speech, so instead of singing the ditty as on terra firma, he personated the captain in the midst of the storm at sea, interpolating the thrice-repeated call ‘A sail!’ and to impart a touch of realism he was wont at this point to drop on one knee. He did this at one of the Hereford Festivals, but Braham being short and the barrier of the platform being high, the result was that he disappeared from the view of his listeners, who, thinking that the platform had given way, rose in a body. When Braham reappeared ‘he was received with shouts of laughter.’

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“John Davey [the writer of the air] was a Devonshire man, who, having studied music under William Jackson, of Exeter, came to London and was engaged to play in the Covent Garden orchestra. Here he made his mark, and provided incidental music to various dramatic pieces. “The Bay of Biscay,” however, is the only song that has brought his name down to us. He died in extreme poverty at May’s Buildings, St. Martin’s Lane, in 1824.”

On May 30, 1805, the great comedian Charles Mathews first appeared at Covent Garden for the benefit of Mr. T. Dibdin, in his original part of Triangle in the comedy of *Guilty or not Guilty*. We shall find him again, seven years later, enlisting under the banner of the Harrises, when his powers as perhaps the greatest and most extraordinary comedian of his time were still unrecognized.

In the course of this season Harris, advised by T. Dibdin, engaged the services of Grimaldi, the famous Drury Lane clown, who has bequeathed his Christian name of Guiseppe, anglicized into “Joe,” as a generic name for the whole race of clowns for evermore. He was at this time still a young man of about twenty-six, and was the son of a former ballet-master of Drury Lane, where, and at Sadler’s Wells, he had even then been engaged for nearly twenty

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years, both as a child and as an adult. Dickens' biography makes it apparent that his defection from the Lane was owing to the somewhat shabby treatment he met with from the new management.

Before leaving the year 1805, and quitting for a moment the overmastering interest of the Kemble fortunes, let us revert to the musical side of Covent Garden's history. The following information regarding the celebrated "Additional Accompaniments to *The Messiah*" by Mozart was disinterred by that learned and indefatigable archæologist, the editor of the *Musical Times*.

"These much-discussed accompaniments were written by Mozart in March, 1789, and were first performed at Covent Garden the 29 March, 1805."*

The advertisement from the *Morning Chronicle* of March 28, 1805, reads thus—

"Last night but two. Oratorios at Playhouse Prices during Lent. Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. To-morrow evening will be performed, for the first time, the sacred Oratorio of *The Messiah*, composed by G. F. Handel, with additional accompaniments by the celebrated W. A. Mozart, of Vienna. Principal vocal performers: Mrs. Ashe and Mrs. Bland, Master Linton and Miss Munday, Mr.

* *Musical Times*, January 1, 1899.

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Braham, Mr. Denman, Mr. Page, Mr. G. Parrin, and Mr. Miller, from Bath. Mr. G. Ashley, leader of the Band. Organ, Mr. J. Ashley. Half Price at the end of the Second Act."

The reception met with by the innovation may best be described as mixed. It seems to have been felt that great works of art should be left untouched, even by the hands of genius. It is curious that in the volume containing the leading violin part of the score used by Sir G. Smart, there is an entry to the effect that the much-criticised accompaniments were performed for the first time at Covent Garden Theatre on January 30, 1813. The testimony we have quoted, however, appears to be quite unimpeachable. It is worthy of remark that Parke frankly avows his entire disbelief in their authenticity, and in a lucid and well-reasoned argument states his reasons for so doing.

During the summer of 1805 Mrs. Siddons had been for her usual provincial tour, and in the season following she played at Covent Garden up to May 26, 1806, which season was also notable for the last appearance at Covent Garden of Mrs. Litchfield, an actress who is said to have possessed one of the finest voices ever heard. Mention must also be made of Kemble's revival of *Henry VIII.* on April 23, with

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himself as Wolsey, and Mrs. Siddons as Queen Katharine. Many of Kemble's changes and adaptations of the text are not approved by the critics.

On November 7, 1805, Harris brought out a one-act sketch, or "Loyal Musical Impromptu," by Dibdin, entitled *Nelson's Glory*, written in a day, to celebrate the memorable naval victory off Trafalgar.

"The performers," says the author, "in consequence of the few hours allowed in which to produce the piece, were generally indulged by permission to read their parts publicly; the occasion ensured this flimsy drama a good reception, and it was acted nine nights."

An interesting sidelight is thrown upon the "maffickers" of 1805 by Dibdin's casual reference to the fact that—

"at night a mob paraded the streets, breaking every window which did not happen to be illuminated in celebration of the gallant Nelson's victory. My wife and I were at the theatre, and our friend [a person who happened to find it convenient to remain a few days in strict incognito], forgetful of his own safety, and concerned only for the danger our windows might be in, deliberately presented himself at the most conspicuous one with a tall candle in each hand, and remained there till the house was completely lighted up."

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Bearing in mind the *furor* created by Betty, it is not surprising to find Kemble tempting fortune with a second infant phenomenon on November 23, 1805, a girl this time, only eight years old, a Miss Mudie, who, like Betty, had won some reputation in the provinces, and was engaged by Kemble to appear as Peggy in *The Country Girl*. It was, however, more than the public could stand, and the poor precocious child was hissed off the stage, in spite of manager Kemble's appeal to the audience. Kemble is blamed by his biographer for his share in the transaction, a view in which I fail to concur. A manager does not invest his capital in a theatre for the purpose of educating the public taste, or raising it to a high level, but to make his living. If he finds that the public prefer plays and players of an inferior kind, and it pays him to provide them, he is not only well justified in so doing, but he would be a fool to do otherwise, unless he is pandering to a taste essentially vicious, which is not alleged in Kemble's case. The Americans crystallize the matter in their saying that a man is not in business for his health, to which one may add nor for other people's improvement, mental or physical.

Mr. Fitzgerald looks upon the disorder at the Mudie fiasco as the beginning of the disturbances which eventually led to and culminated in

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the historical and still more outrageous "O.P." Riots, but the present writer inclines rather to the belief that the origin dates from long before, and that the "O.P." Riots were merely the continuation and climax of a turbulence which, if not tacitly encouraged by the authorities, had at least not been visited with the condign punishment it deserved.

For some unaccountable reason theatrical audiences have always had a curious and irrational way of regarding the relative position of themselves and their entertainers. For at least a century before the period of Kemble's management at Covent Garden there had been occasional outbursts of dissatisfaction from the audience directed against the management. It is possible that in a very few cases it was justified; but reading the history of these occurrences dispassionately and in cool blood, one is astounded not so much at the audience's outrageous demands on the patience and temper of the different theatre authorities, but at the almost cringing deference and moderation of the latter. Surely the right course for the public to take in case they disapprove of the conduct of any theatre is to leave it severely alone. It would most certainly have the quickest effect in bringing a manager to his knees. But such a course as this had never found favour with a section of

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the theatre-going public. They preferred to go to the theatre and create a riot. Of practical measures by the authorities to protect the unfortunate managers there were apparently none worth mentioning in the eighteenth century. The mob were allowed to pelt the stage, to render the voices of the players inaudible, and, in short, to render acting impossible. One of the earliest and most fruitful sources of trouble had been the efforts on the part of the proprietors of various theatres to discontinue the absurd and, as it seems to us, utterly unreasonable desire of the public for seats on the stage. This, it is true, was a custom of old standing, dating perhaps from the time when, as in the case of the old Globe, the theatres were circular in shape, and the actors performed on a raised stage in the middle, in very much the same manner as a circus performs nowadays. But the inconvenience of this grew to such a pitch that quite early in the eighteenth century efforts were made by managers to put a stop to it. There were, in consequence, continuous disputes between them and the public. Nor was this the only cause of trouble. There had been the Fitzpatrick riots, which we have before referred to, and which ended in Beard having to admit the public at half-price after the third act. There were the riots ensuing upon Macklin's playing Macbeth,

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and there had been, of course, disturbances at other theatres besides these which we have enumerated, and which all occurred at Covent Garden.

It appears uncertain upon what actual date the first outrage during Kemble's management occurred ; but, according to his biographer, it was during the superb performance of *Coriolanus* in the year 1806. Genest, in his usual curiously arbitrary fashion, only mentions this play once in the year 1806, viz. on December 5. There were doubtless other performances, and, in any case, the actual date* is of minor importance ; but the occasion is rendered notorious by the fact of an apple being flung at Mrs. Siddons from the galleries. The apple was said to have been thrown at some people behaving noisily in a box, but it provoked a spirited protest from Kemble. He said—

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have been many years acquainted with the benevolence and liberality of a London audience, but we cannot proceed this evening unless we are protected, especially when ladies are thus exposed to insult.” Some one from the gallery then interrupted, “We can't hear you.” He replied, “I will raise my voice, and the galleries *shall* hear me. This protection is what the audience owe it to themselves to grant, and what the performers, for the

* Boaden gives it as November 18, 1806.

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credit of their profession, have a right to demand. I have offered, on the part of the proprietors, a hundred guineas to any man who will disclose the ruffian who has been guilty of this act." He finished by declaring, "I hope I shall never be wanting in my duty to the public, but nothing shall induce me to suffer insult."

This spirited protest had an excellent effect, and for a considerable time we hear of no more outrages. The invaluable addition of Grimaldi's services to the theatre was first made use of this season. During the period intervening between his leaving Drury Lane and the autumn of 1806 he had engaged to play at Dublin under the two Dibdins. The value placed upon his talents may be gauged by the fact that, concurrently with his £6 a week from Covent Garden during his first year there, he was expressly permitted to engage himself at Sadler's Wells at a weekly salary of £12 and two clear benefits.

Covent Garden opened on September 15, 1806, with Colman's comedy of *John Bull*, and the farce of *The Miser*. Mrs. Grimaldi's name also appears as having been one of the singing women in *Henry V.* on September 22, when Kemble played Cardinal Wolsey, and Mrs. Siddons Queen Katharine. On October 9 Grimaldi himself first appeared as Orson in *Valentine and Orson*, Farley playing Valentine.

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It is related in his biography (p. 127) that he considered this the most difficult part he ever had to play, "the multitude of passions requiring to be portrayed, and the rapid succession in which it was necessary to present them before the spectators," involving such tremendous demands upon his nervous system that, after the close of the first act, "he would stagger off to a small room behind the prompter's box and sob and cry aloud, [so] that those about him were very often in doubt, up to the very moment of his being called, whether he would be able to go upon the stage for the second act." The piece was acted nearly every night up to Christmas — enhancing Grimaldi's reputation very greatly—when, owing to the enormous preparations for the memorable production of the famous pantomime of *Mother Goose*, it had to be withdrawn.

The story of this, the most successful and celebrated of all the Covent Garden pantomimes, not excepting even the famous productions of our old friend Rich, must find a place here, setting a seal, as it did, upon the fortunes of Dibdin, the author, Harris, the producer, and, among others, Grimaldi, the clown, who increased his reputation, deservedly high as it stood already, as the foremost low comedian of his day.

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The scheme of the pantomime had been submitted to Harris five years before ; but he did not care about it, and refused it. It would probably have never seen the light even then if, owing to other circumstances which do not concern the story, the theatre had not been hard pressed for a piece about six weeks before Christmas, 1806, when Harris suddenly told Dibdin that he must set to work upon a pantomime immediately. After a few ineffective protests on the ground of shortness of time, etc., he set to work. Grimaldi was engaged as clown, greatly to Dibdin's satisfaction, and the preparations proceeded apace. Harris, however, who had heretofore never missed rehearsals of his pantomimes, had so little hope of the one preparing under such grave disadvantages, that not until the Sunday night previous to the production did he honour it with his presence. On this occasion he was accompanied by Kemble, with whom he had dined, and Dibdin relates that both were in excellent spirits, and not at all anxious respecting the fate of a piece which was ultimately destined to put something like twenty thousand pounds into their pockets. It was produced on December 26, 1806, and, in spite of the fact that those concerned in its preparation had been so gloomily anticipating failure, it proved

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a great and unprecedented success. All doubts were set at rest in a very short time, and enormous houses were drawn night after night for no less than ninety-two representations. With the exception of one break, these were all consecutive, and on the eighty-eighth night, which was as late as June 9, Grimaldi took his benefit, and the receipts amounted to £679 18s. On this occasion Macklin's *Man of the World* was performed, with Sir Pertinax MacSycophant by Mr. Cooke, a character in which he scored immensely, a new comic ballet entitled *Poor Jack*, and *Mother Goose* to wind up with.

After December 5, 1806, Mrs. Siddons did not again act at Covent Garden till April 22, 1807, when she appeared as Lady Macbeth, generally thought to be her most magnificent impersonation. I cannot forbear quoting again from Mr. Fitzgerald's valuable work a part of his analysis of her acting in this character. He says—

“The view she professed to take of it was of a tender, beautiful, interesting lady, who possessed her husband's love, who was urged on by ambition, and who, after the deed was done, was filled with remorse. . . . But the truth is, though she wrote an elaborate essay in support of her theory, we cannot find that

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she carried it into practice, and in the many descriptions of her acting it does not seem to have attracted attention. It was her grandeur and terrible purpose that impressed itself on all beholders, while the other, if attempted, was lost on the audience."

It must not be forgotten that at this time Mrs. Siddons was approaching the evening of her dazzling career; she had been before the public since 1775, although her connection with the subject of this book only dated from 1803. She was even then contemplating retirement from the stage; but she had set herself the task of making a certain sum of money with which to maintain herself in her old age, and this she steadily and bravely went on to earn. Mr. Robertson, who succeeded Brandon as secretary and treasurer of Covent Garden Theatre, gave Thomas Campbell, who wrote a very incomplete Life of the great actress, the following details of her salary there :—

1804-5	...	...	...	...	£20 per night
1805-6	...	...	...	...	£27 „
1806-7	...	...	...	...	30 gns. „
1810-11	...	...	...	...	30 gns. „
1811-12	...	...	...	...	50 gns. „

While the new pieces of the coming season were being rehearsed, a successful revival of *Mother Goose* for twenty nights kept the theatre's patrons in good temper. Dibdin also

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engaged, on the instructions of Mr. Harris, Mrs. Dickons as leading singer for his new opera, *Two Faces under a Hood*, at a salary of £14 a week. At Christmas, Dibdin's pantomime of *Harlequin in His Element* brought him more success and applause.

The opening of the 1807-8 season was marked by a horrible catastrophe at Sadler's Wells Theatre on October 15, 1807, by which twenty-three people lost their lives in a panic created by some persons raising the dreaded cry of "Fire" during the performance. At this time the two brothers Dibdin, Tom and Charles, were proprietors to the extent of three-fourths of Sadler's Wells, the remaining fourth part being subdivided again among four proprietors. T. Dibdin gives a harrowing account of the calamity, which naturally caused both his brother and himself acute distress. Mr. Harris behaved in the kindest manner to them, even inviting Mr. and Mrs. T. Dibdin, for change of air and scene, down to his house, and showing them numberless other instances of his real friendship for them.

The 1807-8 season does not appear to have been specially noteworthy. A new play by Charles Kemble, adapted from the German play of Kotzebue, entitled *The Wanderer*, was brought out on January 12, and on March 10

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Cooke made his first appearance for the season to a record house. There was, as usual, a large proportion of Shakespearian productions, and the season was saddened by the death of an old Covent Garden actor of ability, Thomas Hull, who had acted, although of advanced age, up to December 28 preceding. He had been in the company close on fifty years.

Hull's record was, however, beaten by Mrs. Mattocks, who took a farewell benefit on June 7, 1808. She had actually made her first appearance at Covent Garden as early as 1752 (as Miss Hallam) in the character of the Duke of York in *Richard II.*, and from that date until her retirement in 1808, with the exception of a few provincial tours and a season at the Haymarket in 1799, she played regularly every season at the old house. Genest gives a lengthy list of the characters she sustained, among which are those of Ophelia, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, Jane Shore, Lady Macbeth, Polly Peachum, Lydia Languish, and many others of first-class importance.

It is worth record that on leaving the stage she had saved a sum of £6000, which, owing to a swindling son-in-law, she lost, and in consequence of her misfortune had a benefit at His Majesty's on May 24, 1813, when many of her old comrades, including Mrs. Jordan from

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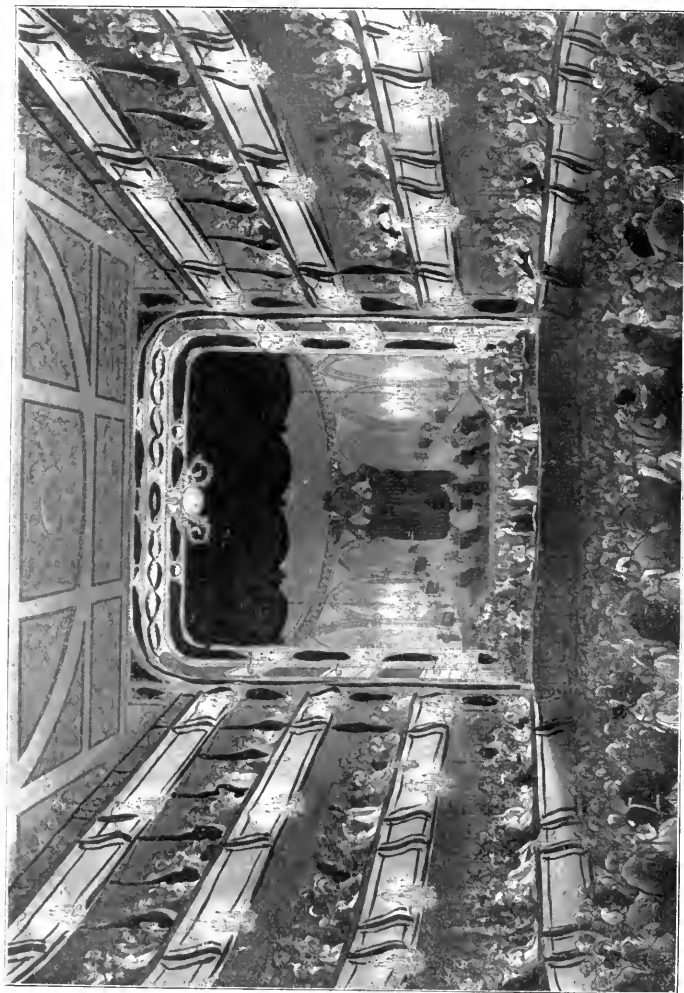
Drury Lane, rallied to her assistance, and by their unselfish aid helped to realize a sum of £1092, with which she purchased an annuity. She died in June, 1826. At her benefit it is interesting to note that previous to the play Mozart's overture to *Zauberflöte* was performed. At the end of the first act "Robin Adair" was sung by Braham; at the end of the second, "The Soldier tired" by Mrs. Dickons; and after the fourth, "Rule Britannia" by Mme. Catalani.

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CHAPTER XI

1808-1811

THE 1808-9 season was rendered historical by the appalling and irreparable calamity which occurred through the destruction of Covent Garden by fire, and which was the indirect cause of the "O.P." Riots and all poor Kemble's ensuing misfortunes. The season opened on September 12, 1808, with *Macbeth* and *Raising the Wind*, and on the night of the 19th *Pizarro* was performed. During the course of the play a gun had to be fired, and it was conjectured that a piece of smouldering wadding from this gun might have caused the outbreak. It began at four o'clock in the morning, and those acquainted with the combustible nature of theatrical properties will not be surprised to hear that by six o'clock the interior was gutted and the roof had fallen in. Unhappily, the great fire was attended by unusual loss of life, for some unfortunate firemen, who had brought their hose under the colonnade to better play upon the flames, were killed by the fall of a roof, while



INTERIOR OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE DURING AN ORATORIO, SHOWING HANDEL'S ORGAN.
After an Aquatint by Pugin and Roclandson, dated 1858.

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others were scalded to death by the steam. The unfortunate victims had incautiously followed a party of firemen who bravely carried a hose through the great doors opening under the piazza, which at that time led into the theatre. The roof of this passage fell in and buried the party, no less than eleven dead bodies being afterwards found there, three of whom were firemen belonging to the Phoenix Fire Office. The remaining victims of the calamity are said to have perished from the scalding steam, which they were presumably exposed to by pressing too near the burning ruins. In all, it is believed, twenty-two persons perished. The entire contents were lost: the valuable scenery and scenic properties, stage jewellery and armour, the actors' and actresses' valuable dresses, the wines of the Beef Steak Club (these alone valued at £1500), and, still more calamitous, Handel's organ in the theatre, which he had bequeathed to Rich* at his death, and which had passed on to the then proprietors, together with many of his original MS. scores of operas, and others by Arne, all of which combined to render this, regarded from an artistic standpoint, the most terrible of all theatrical fires.

* Note from a codicil to Handel's will, dated August 4, 1757: "I give to John Rich, Esquire, my great organ that stands at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden."

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According to Boaden's account, for about one hour there was a total want of water, the main pipe having been cut off with the intention of laying down a new one. Afterwards water was procured, and the engines played upon the burning ruins for some time. It will be remembered that the theatre presented no frontage into Bow Street, the entrance therefrom being between two of the houses, a row of which completely masked the east end of the theatre. The fire destroyed no less than seven of these houses, including a public-house called the Smugglers. These seven houses are shown very plainly on Horwood's well-known plan of 1799, and are therein numbered 11 to 17, Bow Street. The houses opposite, in Hart Street, which was even narrower than Bow Street, also caught fire, and were with difficulty saved.

It is interesting to read that the Bedford and Piazza coffee-houses were saved by a wall which had not long before been erected by the theatre's proprietors to guard themselves from fire in that direction. Needless to say, the destruction of the theatre was a fearful blow to Kemble. His loan from Mr. Heathcote was still only partly repaid, and it almost meant his starting his career afresh.

Boaden gives the following account of a visit he paid Kemble at his house in Great Russell

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Street the next day. He found the great actor in his dressing-room standing before the glass, totally absorbed, and yet at intervals attempting to shave himself. His wife, his brother Charles, and a visitor were also present. He presently burst into a speech of the inflated language he was occasionally wont to indulge in, "Yes, it has perished—that magnificent theatre. It is gone with all its treasures of every description," which he proceeded to describe in their order of importance.

"That library, which contained all those immortal productions of our countrymen prepared for the purpose of representation. That vast collection of music, composed by the greatest geniuses in that science, by Handel, Arne, and others. That wardrobe, stored with the costumes of all ages and nations, accumulated by unwearied research, and at incredible expense. Scenery, the triumph of the art, unrivalled for its accuracy, and so exquisitely finished. . . .

"Of all this vast treasure, nothing now remains but the arms of England over the entrance of the theatre and the Roman eagle standing solitary in the market-place."

The following letter is one written by Mrs. Siddons to her great friend Lady Harcourt in reply to a letter of condolence :—

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“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,

“ . . . As yet I have had neither recollection nor time to think of anything except the tremendous devastation and its afflicting consequences.

“ My poor brother bears it most nobly with manly firmness, hope, and even cheerful resignation. And for me I now think only of the mercy which was vouchsafed us in his not having heard of the fire till the whole structure was devoured, so that the lives of both my brothers, which would have been risked in the efforts they would have exerted (perhaps at the expense of limbs and life), are safe. God be praised.

“ I myself was in the house till near twelve o'clock. Mr. Brandon and the watchman saw all safe at near one, and it is as true as it is strange that not a fragment of the whole structure was discoverable at six, at which time my brother first heard of it, and he declared that at that time it was so completely destroyed that you could not have known a building had stood there. The losses of scenes, dresses, etc., are, as you may imagine, incalculable and irreparable. I have lost everything, all my jewels and lace, which I have been collecting for thirty years, and which I could not purchase again, for they were all really fine and curious. I had a point veil which had been a toilette of the poor Queen of France, near five yards long, and which could not have been bought for anything like so little as a thousand pounds, destroyed, with dresses of my

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own of great value for costume. In short, everything I had in the world of stage ornament is gone, and literally not one vestige left of all that has cost me so much time and money to collect. We are to act at the Opera, and next Monday I shall attempt the character of Lady Randolph there. My poor dear brother has to begin the world again. Mrs. Kemble bears it like an angel. Of course, I am with them every moment that I can. It is a glorious feeling to see how many noble and friendly attentions have been shown to him on this occasion.

“Lord Guildford and Lord Mountjoy have offered to advance him any sum of money they can raise by any means. My head is confused, I scarce know what I write, but you, my dear Lady H., will have the goodness to excuse any incoherence under these circumstances.

“The Prince, too, has been so good and gracious. Everybody is good and kind, and, please God, we shall still do well. Adieu.”

The calamity was certainly to have one most gratifying effect. It showed Kemble and his sister the intense respect and sympathy felt for them from the highest in the realm down to the humblest. Foremost among the munificent contributions towards the fund for rebuilding was the princely gift of the Duke of Northumberland, £10,000, the bond for which he cancelled when the first stone was laid. Kemble's mode of acknowledging it was characteristic, but

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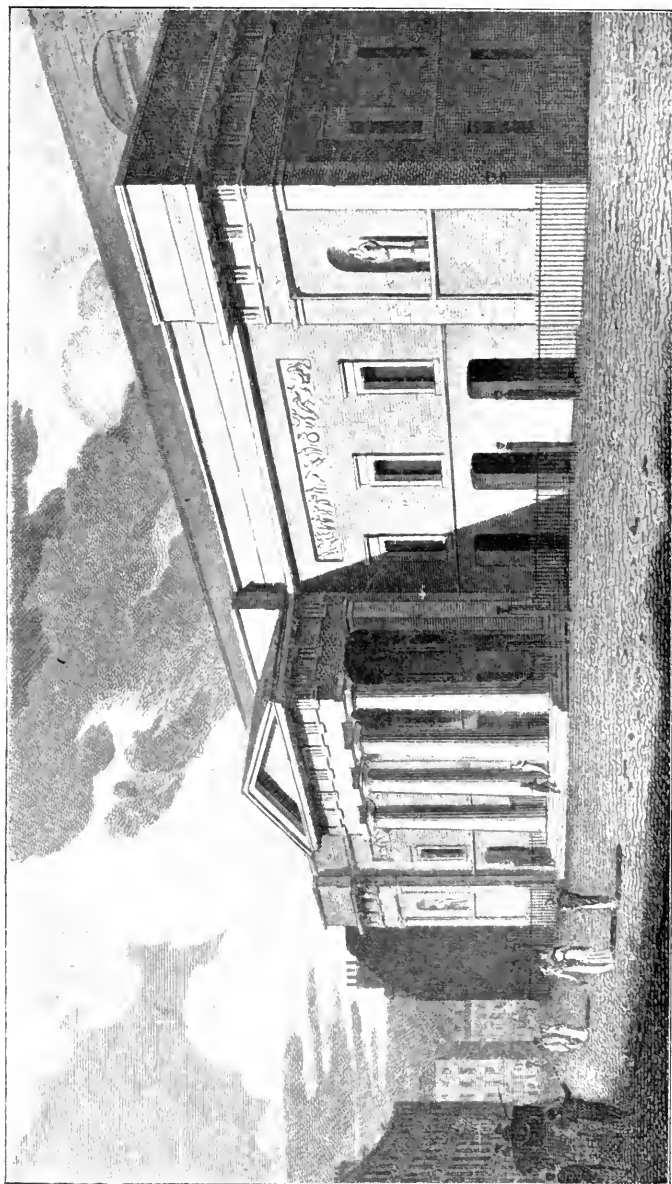
not exactly in the same generous spirit which prompted the gift.

During the rebuilding, for which immediate preparations were commenced, the company were transferred to the King's Theatre, where they opened on September 26 with *Douglas*, "even in their disaster too strong to fear competition." The subscription fund mounted as high as £75,000, and about the same amount (Boaden says £45,000) was recovered from the insurance companies, and on December 30, 1808, the first stone of the new building was laid by the Prince of Wales with great state and masonic ceremony. Kemble himself had been admitted into the order only the night before. An immense concourse of visitors and all the theatre company were present, including Mrs. Siddons, in a hat with a nodding plume of black feathers. It was unluckily a very wet day, and poor Kemble had to rise from a sick bed to take part in the ceremony, attired in white silk stockings and thin "pumps."

The architect was Richard Smirke, junior, afterwards Sir R. Smirke.*

The following elaborate and detailed architectural account of the new building is partly taken from Hughson's "History of London," vol. vi. p. 811.

* Sir Richard Smirke, R.A. (1781—1867), a celebrated architect. Designed the Mint, General Post Office, the British Museum, etc.



EAST FRONT OF THE NEW THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN, AS REBUILT AFTER THE FIRE IN 1808.

From an Engraving by S. Ruddle.

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The new theatre was opened within twelve months of the destruction of the former, and the front, which was a correct model of Grecian (Doric) architecture, partly copied from the Temple of Minerva at Athens, was 220 feet in width. The four fluted columns supporting the portico were said to be, with the exception of those of the portico of the great original at the Acropolis, and of St. Peter's at Rome, the largest in Europe, viz. 5 feet 6 inches in diameter. This portico was severely condemned by many critics. Boaden says "it astonished by its ponderous inutility."

In the lower part of the front an arcade extended from one end to the other; this was constructed of stone, while the superstructure was of cement. The front was terminated at each end by a pair of pilasters with the figures of Comedy and Tragedy between them. Along the top of the front portion were bas-reliefs illustrating the fathers of ancient and modern dramatic poetry. These were from highly elaborate designs by Flaxman and Rossi. A full description of both designs is to be found in Hughson. The following is a description of the modern drama only, which occupied the south side of the portico.

In the centre of one portion sat Shakespear with the poet's lyre, and the masks of Comedy

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and Tragedy at his feet. Surrounding him were the figures of Caliban, laden with wood ; Ferdinand, sheathing his sword ; and Miranda, entreating Prospero for her lover. They were represented as led on by Ariel above, playing on a lyre.

Other Shakespearian conceptions were represented by Lady Macbeth and her husband turning in horror from the body of Duncan.

The centre of the other portion of the south bas-relief was occupied by Milton, seated and contemplating Urania, having Samson Agonistes chained at his feet. The remaining figures represented the masque of Comus.

Boaden's somewhat hypercritical description of the sculptured figures, ignoring the limitations of available space, complains of the absence of any representation of the Shakespearian comedies, and that Jonson and Congreve were left out.

The grand entrance hall under the portico, for which space had been made by purchasing the sites of the burnt houses fronting into Bow Street, was about 40 feet square, with stone staircases and red porphyry pillars, and white-veined marble walls.

The anteroom was adorned with red (imitation) porphyry pilasters, having gold capitals and vases. A statue of Shakespear, by Rossi, stood

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here in a niche, and is variously described by contemporary writers as "a beautiful statue," and a "clownish exhibition of a long unmeaning figure." It was said to be of "a new design, 7 feet high, having the face more like the Felton likeness than the Chandos, the figure standing in a graceful attitude, folding his drapery round him."

Entering the boxes from the portico, you turned to the left, as in the present theatre, and at the top of a short flight of steps, surmounted by pedestals and bronze urns, on each side sat the money-takers. Another flight of steps led to the saloon, which was 60 feet long, and was supported by red pilasters and ornamented by plaster casts of classic statuary. The extremity to the right and left led to "a confectionary," where refreshments were supplied. The "sophas" had scarlet covers and black velvet borders. There was another and similar saloon on the story above for the boxes on the next tier.

The corridors surrounding the boxes were of stone and 9 feet wide. The doors to the boxes were of solid mahogany.

The form of the auditorium was of the conventional horseshoe shape, and was at the extreme width 51 feet 2 inches, the depth from the front lights to the box fronts being 52 feet 9 inches.

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There were three tiers of boxes of twenty-six each. The fronts of these were painted cream colour, with pink-and-gold ornaments and mouldings. These "boxes" were totally different and separate from the "private boxes" which were twenty-six in number, and were approached by a separate staircase from the portico. The ordinary or public boxes each contained three rows of seats, holding ten persons in all, while the private boxes were luxurious affairs on the third tier, each possessing a little retiring room, and furnished with chairs for the gorgeous personages who rented them annually. The pit had a "declivity" of 4 feet 9 inches, as compared with the former one of 3 feet only. It had two central entrances or gangways, extending up to the orchestra, a plan which modern theatre designers might well copy. Each seat was 25 inches wide. The entrances to the pit were from the piazza and the south side of the portico in Bow Street.

The galleries opened by five doors into a spacious lobby, which was claimed as a great improvement as regards ventilation upon the former theatre. The house was lighted by 40 glass chandeliers arranged in front of each circle, the nightly supply being of 270 wax candles. The ceiling was painted to represent a dome. The proscenium was a large arch having red

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curtains and gold fringe festooned from the top, with the motto painted in gold letters, “Veluti in Speculum.”

Whatever were the defects in the auditorium, there seems to be a general consensus of opinion that the new stage was a fine one. It was designed by Mr. Saul, the chief stage-carpenter, and even Boaden says it was “the most perfect with which I am acquainted.”

Dibdin gives the following measurements—

						ft.	ins.
Width of the proscenium in front	...	...	...	...	...	42	6
„ at (? between) pilasters	...	...	...	...	...	38	8
Height to the centre of arch	...	...	...	...	...	36	9
„ at spring of arch	...	...	...	...	...	33	3
Depth of stage from front lights to the sliding pilasters (?)						12	3
„ „ „ „ back wall	...	...	...	...	...	68	0
Width from wall to wall	...	...	...	...	...	82	6
Height of flats	...	...	...	...	...	21	0
Width of flats (14 feet each half)	...	...	...	...	...	28	0
„ side scenes	...	...	...	...	...	4	0

On the left of the stage were passages to the three green rooms, the principal one of which was handsomely furnished with crimson seats and curtains. Dibdin’s account says (1825)—

“it was handsomely carpeted, and there was a large chimney-glass over the stove (*q.v.*), with a portrait of the late T. Harris, Esq., so many years a proprietor of that theatre. Performers receiving under a certain salary are not allowed to enter this room but on particular occasions.”

The second green room contained a pianoforte

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for the choristers to learn their music. Beyond the best green room was the manager's room, and coffee-room, property-room, etc. The flies were of two stories, and were filled with the machinery used in lowering the curtain, drops, wheels, borders, etc. Adjoining them was the painting-room, lighted by skylights, and measuring 72 feet long and 32 feet wide.

Dibdin gives the following approximate list of persons employed in the great theatre :—

Stage.—The stage manager, pantomime director, chorus and ballet masters, prompter, his deputy, copyists (several), property man, and call-boy.

Orchestra.—Director, leader of the band, 6 or 8 first violins, 6 or 8 second violins, 2 tenors, two 'cellos, 3 or 4 double basses, oboe and flageolet, first and second flutes, first and second clarionets, first and second horns, first and second bassoons, trombone, trumpet and bugle, piano-forte, bells, carillons or small bells, and kettle-drums, music copyist and assistants, and an attendant to lay out music.

Painting-room.—Four principal painters constantly employed, exclusive of accessory principals, colour grinders, and attendants.

Decorative Machinery.—The property maker, machinist, master carpenter, 6 or 8 carpenters, 24 to 30 scene men. The property maker

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and master carpenter generally are the joint machinist (*sic*).

Wardrobe.—Master tailor and keeper of the gentlemen's wardrobe, etc., mistress of the ladies' wardrobe, both with assistants, and dressers of both sexes.

House Department.—Treasurer, under treasurer, housekeeper and assistant, 10 money-takers, 10 check-takers, box-keeper and attendants, lamplighters, firemen, porters, and watchmen.

The house held, when full, and *after* the riots had caused certain alterations, 2800 persons. Its principal drawback, according to Hughson's account, was the smallness of the galleries, and their ill adaptation for a view of the stage. The private boxes themselves also were too high for their wealthy patrons' taste, being in the third tier, while their construction had involved certain limitations of space in other parts of the house.

It is only fair to say that with the fate of the former theatre and of Drury Lane before their eyes, the builders adopted every means of protection from fire that the ingenuity of the time could devise. "At all convenient intervals were strong party-walls with iron doors. The fire-places were all made with the grates to turn upon a pivot, by which means the front can be moved round to the back, and the fire thus

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extinguished. Water pipes were also insinuated into every part of the house, like veins through the human body. Great brass cocks present themselves to the eye in the lobbies and other open places." Seven millions of bricks were said to have been laid in the seven months during which the building was under construction. A vast expense was incurred in building and furnishing the new theatre, amounting to £300,000 and upwards, and at the time of opening, in 1809, there was a debt due from the proprietors on account of the former theatre amounting to £30,000. To meet this sum of £330,000, the joint funds in hand were £45,000 recovered for insurance, and £76,000, or thereabouts, raised by granting annuities and free admissions into the theatre to certain persons called "new subscribers."

It is an extraordinary fact, and must be briefly referred to here, that on February 24, 1809, the splendid old theatre of Drury Lane also took fire, and was utterly burnt to the ground. It was on this historic occasion that Mr. Elliott proposed the adjournment of the House of Commons in sympathy with Sheridan, a motion which the latter very properly deprecated.

Such was the parlous state of Sheridan's finances and those of his partners in the great

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concern, that they were unable to make any effort whatever to rebuild their property, and it was not until Mr. Whitbread, M.P., and other noblemen and gentlemen came to the rescue with a special Bill to legalize a joint-stock company that a beginning was made to construct the new edifice. It was started in October, 1811, and reopened on October 10, 1812.

We must now turn, reluctantly and sadly enough, to the dark page that disgraces the history of the theatrical public of 1809.

The facts of the slight alteration to the galleries and consequent increase in prices necessitated by the enormous outlay upon the new theatre have already been referred to. These were duly announced in the newspapers and bills, and on September 18, 1809, the theatre reopened with *Macbeth* and the musical farce of *The Quaker*. The great building was soon filled, and the audience took their seats quietly, and without any warning of the coming storm. The orchestra and people joined cordially in the National Anthem, and Kemble made his appearance to speak, as was customary on such occasions, a poetical address upon the opening of the building. This was the signal for the outbreak of hostilities, and a pandemonium commenced that rendered the entire performance inaudible. The public malevolence was more

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especially directed against poor Kemble and any member of his family who ventured on the stage. The play was proceeded with in dumb show, the ruffianly pittites standing up with their hats on and their backs to the stage throughout the evening. Nor was this limited to the opening performance; night after night the extraordinary scene went on, in spite of arrests by the Bow Street runners of certain ringleaders, who were taken before the magistrates and bound over to appear at the sessions. The whole business was engineered in the most systematic and disgraceful manner. Dibdin tells us—

“ ‘There was a strange mixture of whimsicality and distressing circumstances exhibited all through the riot. When the performers entered they were greeted with applause, to indicate that what would follow was not meant personally to them; but the instant they attempted to speak, ‘Off! off!’ overpowering hisses, appalling hoots, and the ‘O.P. Dance’ commenced, in which the whole audience joined. The dance was performed with deliberate and ludicrous gravity, each person pronouncing the letters ‘O.P.’ as loud as he could, and accompanying the pronunciation of each with a beat, or blow on the floor or seat beneath him with his feet, a stick, or a bludgeon, and as the numerous performers kept in strict time and unison with each other, it was one of the most whimsically tantalizing

KEMBLE, hear—John Bull advises—To save your fame—And sink your Prices!!!



These are the House that Jack built.

These are the Fugitives over the House, let to the Great, that built the House that Jack built.



This is John Bull, with a Bugle-bone, that built the House that Jack built. This is the Threshing down and down, that took up John Bull with the Bugle-bone, who built the Cat, who gazed to speak to the Poor in the Fugitives over the House that Jack built. This is the Cat, who gazed to speak to the Poor in the Fugitives over the House that Jack built. This is the Threshing down and down, that took up John Bull with the Bugle-bone, who built the Cat, who gazed to speak to the Poor in the Fugitives over the House that Jack built.

This is the Threshing down and down, that took up John Bull with the Bugle-bone, who built the Cat, who gazed to speak to the Poor in the Fugitives over the House that Jack built.

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

Illustrated by John Robinson, 1890.

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banters or torments that could be conceived. Numerous placards were exhibited in all parts of the theatre, some of them very offensive, others ludicrous."

The newspapers, of course, took sides enthusiastically on the question; the *Times* and *Post* supporting Kemble, while the *Chronicle* favoured the rioters. In the *Chronicle* appeared the following effusion on the subject, which needs little explanation. The "Cat" was Madame Catalani, whom Kemble had engaged, and against whom, as a foreigner, the popular resentment was especially manifested.

"This is the house that Jack built.

These are the boxes let to the great that visit the house, etc.

These are the pigeon-holes over the boxes let to the great, etc.

This is the Cat engaged to squall to the poor in the pigeon-holes, etc.

This is John Bull with a bugle-horn that hissed the Cat, etc.

This is the thief-taker, shaven and shorn, that took up John Bull, etc.

This is the manager full of scorn, who raised the prices to the people forlorn,

And directed the thief-taker, shaven and shorn,

To take up John Bull with his bugle-horn,

Who hissed the Cat engaged to squall to the poor in the pigeon-holes over the boxes let to the great that visit the house that Jack built."

Boaden says—

"It must have been attended with no inconsiderable expense to its perpetrators, for, besides the price paid on their admission, many thousand handbills and placards were printed in every variety of type, and even banners

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painted, sometimes ingenious enough in their designs, but always personal, malignant, or indecent in their inscriptions. Occasional irruptions were made by Townshend and his assistants into the pit . . . and sometimes, after desperate conflicts, the officers bore away in triumph the standards of the enemy.”

Kemble and the other actors displayed a perfectly marvellous self-possession, good temper, and control of their feelings, the former frequently endeavouring to reason with his tormentors, by bringing forward arguments and proofs showing that the proprietors had not for years received seven per cent.* on their capital, and that only on money risked in the most speculative and risky of all possible properties, a theatre. He offered to submit his books to a committee of impartial persons to consist of the Governor of the Bank of England, the Solicitor-General, and other eminent gentlemen, and this was actually done. They published a report substantially confirming all that Kemble had stated, but all to no purpose. The many headed were, as usual, the empty headed. They preferred to continue the riot, which the authorities only made the feeblest efforts to quell. Boaden asserts in so many words that the whole business

* The average of the six years 1803-9 was 6½ per cent. (See Appendix.)

The Publick are respectfully informed that the
New Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden,
WILL BE OPENED

This present MONDAY, Sept. 18, 1809,

With the Tragedy of

M A C B E T H.

With entirely new Scenery, Dresses, & Decorations.
 The Overture and Symphonies between the Acts by Mr. **HARRIS**,
 The Final March by **MATTHEW LOCK**.

Duncan, King of Scotland, by Mr. **CHAPMAN**,
 Malcolm by Mr. **CLAREMONT**, Donalbain by Mr. **MENAGE**,
 Macbeth by Mr. **KEMBLE**, Macduff by Mr. **C. KEMBLE**,
 Banquo by Mr. **MURRAY**, Fleance by Mr. **BRISTOW**,
 Lenox by Mr. **CRESWELL**, Ross by Mr. **BRUNTON**,
 Siward Mr. **ATKINS**, Seyton Mr. **JEFFERIES**, Physician Mr. **DAVENPORT**
 Officers, Messrs. Thompson & Wilde, Chamberlains, Messrs. Heath & Truman
 Gentlemen, Messrs. Brown, Grant, Holland, Louis, Powers, Sergeant,
 Lady Macbeth by Mrs. **SIDIGANS**,
 Gentlewoman by Mrs. **HUMPHRIES**,
 Ladies, Mesdames Bologna, L. Bologna, Cox, Crawford, Follott, Whitmore,
 Apparitions, Mrs. Field, Miss Goodwin, Miss C. Goodwin,
 Hecate by Mr. **BELLAMY**, Witches, Messrs. **BLANCHARD**, **FARLEY**, **SIMMONS**

To which will be added the musical Entertainment of

The QUAKER.

Steady by Mr. **INCLEDON**, Easy by Mr. **DAVENPORT**,
 Lubin by Mr. **TAYLOR**, Solomon by Mr. **LISION**,
 John by Mr. **HOLLAND**, Thomas by Mr. **TRUMAN**,
 Gillian Miss **BOLTON**, Cecily Miss **LESLIE**, Floretta Mrs. **LISION**.
Before the Play, an Occasional Address on the opening of the Theatre,
 Will be spoken by Mr. **KEMBLE**.

Places for the Boxes to be taken of Mr. **BRANNOCK**, at the Box-Office in Hart-Street.
 The Doors will be opened at HALF past FIVE, and the Play begin at HALF past SIX.
 A. MASTERS, PRINTER, L. Bow-Street. J. BENTLEY & SONS, L.

THE PROPRIETORS, having completed the **NEW THEATRE** within the time originally promised, beg leave respectfully to state to the Publick the absolute necessity that compels them to make the following advance on the prices of admission:

BOXES, Seven Shillings. ——— Three Shillings and Sixpence.
PIT, Four Shillings. ——— Two Shillings, as usual.

The **LOWER** and **UPPER GALLERIES** will remain at the old Prices.

On the late calamitous destruction of their property, the proprietors, encouraged by the remembrance of former patronage, instantly and cheerfully applied themselves to the erection of a new Theatre, solicitous only that, without enlarging the audience-part of the edifice, it might afford the Publick improved accommodation and security, and at the same time present an additional ornament to the Metropolis of the British Empire. This, their most anxious wish, they flatter themselves they have solidly effected, not only within the short space of ten months from the laying of the foundations, but under the unseasonably expensive disadvantage of circumstances singularly unfavourable to building.—When it is known that no less a sum than one hundred and fifty thousand pounds has been expended in order to render this Theatre worthy of British Spectators, and of the Genius of their native Poets:—when, in this undertaking, the inevitable accumulation of, at least, a sixfold rentage is positively stated to be incurred:—and when, in addition to these pressing incumbrances, the increased and rapidly increasing prices of every article indispensable to dramatick representations come to be considered:—the proprietors persuade themselves that in their proposed regulation they shall be honoured with the concurrence of an enlightened and liberal Publick.

The attention of the Publick is requested to the following description of the
Entrances to the new Theatre.

BOXES.

The principal Entrance is at the Portico in Bow-Street, leading to the Stone Hall and Staircase.

The West Entrance is in Prince's-Place, leading from the Piazza in Covent-Garden to the Stone Staircase and Ante-room.

PIT.

The principal Entrance is from the Piazza, through Bedford-Avenue, leading by five doors to the Stone Vestibule and Staircases.

The East Entrance is in the Arcade, South of the Portico in Bow-Street, leading to the Stone Vestibule and Staircases.

LOWER GALLERY.

The principal Entrance is from the Piazza, through Bedford-Avenue.

LOWER and UPPER GALLERIES.

The Entrance is at the Eastern extremity of Bedford-Avenue in Bow-Street.

ANNUAL BOXES.

The Entrances are in Prince's-Place, leading from Hart-Street;—and in the Arcade, North of the Portico in Bow-Street.

••• Ladies and Gentlemen going to the Theatre by any of the Entrances in Bow-Street, are requested to order their Coachmen to set down with their horses heads towards Long-Acre,—and to drive off through Little Bow-Street.

Ladies and Gentlemen coming to the Annual Boxes in Prince's-Place, are requested to order their Coachmen to drive to the Theatre through Long-Acre and down James-Street into Hart-Street,—or through Covent-Garden up James-Street into Hart-Street,—and to drive from the Theatre through the same Streets.

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was in some way connected with the political affairs of the day, and that Kemble was selected as the victim, because he had fallen out with Sheridan, who was then in the full flush of his political career. However this may be, the incompetence of the official efforts to suppress the rioters led Kemble and his co-proprietors to the very natural, but perhaps mistaken, course of taking the law into their own hands. They accordingly engaged "Dutch Sam" and other well-known pugilists to go into the pit and fight the mob. Matters had by this time become very serious, and it is incomprehensible to our law-abiding ideas that even the supine authorities of the day could sit down and allow the scum of London to have its way. The rioters had among them certain persons of a superior class, and one of these, Henry Clifford by name, was, on October 31, that is to say, nearly six weeks from the beginning of the affair, arrested and brought before the magistrates, charged with inciting to riot. Apparently there was a legal flaw in the proceeding, for Clifford was discharged, and immediately brought an action for false imprisonment against Brandon the box-keeper. Incredible as it may seem, the jury, in the face of the very decided opinion of Sir James Mansfield, found for the plaintiff Clifford, and assessed the damages at £5. This proved

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to be the last straw in the load of indignity heaped upon Kemble. His tormentors had piled insults of the grossest kind upon him, they had literally stopped at nothing short of personal violence. His family had been terrorized, and ladies in a delicate state of health were pelted with bitten apples on the stage. Ruin stared him in the face, and it is not surprising that he was finally forced to yield.

It makes one's blood boil even now to read the pathetic letter of Mrs. Siddons describing the state of constant alarm the family lived in.

“My appearance of illness was occasioned entirely by an agitating visit that morning from poor Mr. John Kemble, on account of the giving up of the private boxes, which I fear must be at last complied with. Surely nothing ever equalled the domineering of the mob in these days. It is to me inconceivable how the public at large submits to be thus dictated to, against their better judgment, by a handful of imperious and intoxicated men. . . . But only conceive what a state he must have been in, however good a face he might put upon the business for upwards of three months, and think what his poor wife and I must have suffered when, for weeks together, such were the outrages committed on his house and otherwise that I trembled for even his personal safety; she, poor soul, living with ladders at her windows, in order to

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make her escape through the garden in case of an attack. Mr. Kemble tells me his nerves are much shaken."

Mr. Fitzgerald — whose excellent account of the riots* has been of great value to the writer of these pages—can find only one possible plea that may be advanced in favour of the rioters. He reminds us, however, that William Cobbett was amongst those eminent politicians who lifted up their voices on behalf of the victims.

"He [Cobbett] rebuked the vulgar cry so often heard of calling Kemble and his sister 'upstarts'—those great artists who had been before them so many years. He said the original proceedings of the rioters were opposed to ordinary commercial rules, and amounted to an 'attempt to compel people to sell entertainment at the price pointed out by the purchasers.' 'This plain and practical view was very near the truth. I say very near because he did not give full force to the objection that the theatres, by their patents and established position, had almost a monopoly of the theatrical amusements of the town. In conclusion, he advised terms of conciliation, which were nearly the same as those ultimately agreed upon."

Mr. Genest finds fault with the proprietors

* "Lives of the Kembles," vol. ii.

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for the splendour of their new theatre. He contends that for the very reason of their having sustained a severe loss they should have practised economy, instead of which they built a magnificent theatre, "rather for the gratification of Kemble (Harris being too ill to interfere) than for the accommodation of the public." He further points out that it was but seventeen years since the price of seats in the boxes had been raised from five to six shillings, and it was now again advanced to seven shillings.

Matters having thus arrived at breaking-point, Kemble, as we have seen, decided to give in to his tyrannical masters. But while he was willing to concede most of their demands, the abolition of the special or private boxes (about which much extremely ridiculous clamour was made) and the lowering of the pit prices, there was one demand he, as an English gentleman and a just man, demurred strongly to. This was the dismissal of the zealous and faithful servant, John Brandon. Brandon, it will be remembered, was one of the oldest and most valuable servants of the great theatre. He had, according to Dibdin, first entered its service in 1768, with Mr. Leake, who was a bookseller in the Strand. He was therefore a man of at least more than middle age, who had passed a lifetime in his employment. He it was who was relied on by Kemble to

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“doctor” Cooke after his drunken orgies had rendered him incapable of standing upright, and who so far succeeded that the wretched man somehow managed to stumble through his parts.*

He had incurred the hot resentment of the “O.P.” rioters by his spirited and courageous exertions to defeat them. They had detected, or thought they had, his advice in the matter of the employment of hired pugilists to meet violence with violence, and nothing would satisfy them but his dismissal. Kemble attended a certain dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern at which three hundred rioters were present, under the chairmanship of the redoubtable but rascally Henry Clifford. Here he agreed to nearly all their demands, signing a paper to that effect before he left the room. Afterwards he endeavoured to induce them to waive the clause, but in vain, and so the good and faithful servant

* Of him or of his son James, Alfred Bunn, in his account of “The Stage,” tells a highly amusing anecdote :—

“ Poor Jemmy Brandon, of box-office memory, seeing a creditor nearing the theatre, went out to the door for the purpose of being accosted by him, and, to the man’s inquiry, ‘ Pray, is Mr. Brandon at home ? ’ Jemmy, well aware his person was not known, unhesitatingly replied, ‘ No, sir, he is not.’ A few minutes afterwards Mr. Harris sent for Brandon, to consult him upon some matter of policy, and asked him, ‘ Now, Jem, what would you advise us to say to the public ? ’ Brandon, after a very short reflection, passing his hand over his face to denote his having come to a conclusion, and notwithstanding that his whole life had of necessity been passed in the practice, deliberately said, ‘ Suppose, for once, we tell ’em a lie ! ’ ”

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had no option but to retire—at all events, temporarily—from the duties he had discharged so well.*

The final degradation of all came when, after the dismissal of Brandon, the great actor himself was forced to drink to the bitter dregs the cup of humiliation on December 15, 1809, by publicly apologizing to the audience for the employment of “improper persons,” the aforementioned pugilists to wit.

This formality over, the rioters at last hoisted a placard from the pit, with the words “we are satisfied,” and the worst of the horrible business was done. By what was certainly a foolish piece of mismanagement, Kemble tried to evade the entire fulfilment of the agreement at the beginning of the 1810–11 season, and there was a renewal of the old disturbance, necessitating the closing of the theatre until eight of the private boxes were done away with, and not till then were the historical “O.P.” riots entirely at an end.

During the year 1809 the veteran Mr. Thomas

* Afterwards he was, however, reinstated, and in 1812 was appointed, under a deed of settlement, by direction of the Lord Chancellor, treasurer of the theatre. He remained in the service of the proprietors until 1823, when he was discharged by Chas. Kemble, and was superseded by Henry Robertson. Brandon then left Covent Garden, after fifty-five years' service, with an annuity of £200 a year, and was employed by Mr. Elliston at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (Dibdin). He died in 1825.

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Harris had retired into private life, partly owing to ill health, caused, no doubt, by the fire and its attendant worries and anxieties. His son Henry took up his share of the burden of management, but we shall see that, owing to the fact that his agreement with the other partners did not give him the sole control his father had enjoyed, his rule was not marked by the length of time and conspicuous success the elder man had experienced.

To turn for a moment to other matters, we learn from Parke's "Memoirs" that Madame Catalani was this season engaged for the Lenten oratorios, and appeared at their commencement on March 10, in a grand selection. Parke says, "Her voice resounded in that new and superb theatre, and in 'Angels ever bright and fair' . . . she received unbounded applause," so that it is evident the public had by this time quite overcome the dislike to the great singer, so pointedly shown during the "O.P." riots.

On June 12, 1810, *Mother Goose* was actually revived for the fourth year in succession.

Another matter that must not be forgotten was the engagement of Charles Mayne Young, who had "opened" with the company at the King's Theatre, or Opera House, on November 10, 1808, during the dark days immediately following the fire. He was at the time only

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thirty-one years of age, but he obtained front rank at once, and in 1810 we find him playing many of Kemble's own parts.

On June 25, 1810, Grimaldi took his benefit, playing Bob Acres in *The Rivals*, and appearing also in the pantomime from the preceding Christmas, *Harlequin Asmodeus, or Cupid on Crutches*, for the forty-sixth time. His biographer tells us that during this month he had to play clown at Sadler's Wells also, the pantomime being acted as first piece at Sadler's Wells and last piece at Covent Garden. Not having time to change his dress, he was accustomed to have a coach in waiting, into which he threw himself the moment he had finished at Sadler's Wells, and was driven to Covent Garden to begin again. One night it so happened that by some forgetfulness on the part of the driver the coach failed to make its appearance. It was a very wet night, and not having a moment to lose, he sent for another. This he found it impossible to obtain, and after some few minutes of hesitation he set out to run through the streets. The sight of Grimaldi in his clown's dress, running at top speed through the lighted streets of Clerkenwell, naturally drew a mob of people after him, shouting his name and making a great hubbub, until finally he jumped into a coach in Holborn, and, escorted by his ragged followers, was

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deposited at the stage door just in time to go on the stage.

At the end of the 1810 season T. Dibdin terminated his engagement with the management of Covent Garden, sold the lease of his London house, and retired to live and work at Betchworth, in Surrey.

The season following the "O.P." riots, 1810-11, did not see anything more noteworthy than Kemble's revival of Addison's tragedy of *Cato*, in which his friend and biographer, Boaden, considered he scored one of his greatest triumphs.

The worthy Genest is terribly exercised by Kemble's sensational revival, on February 18, 1811, of the pantomime of *Bluebeard*.* By the enforced abolition of the twenty-six private boxes the proprietors were the losers of no less than £10,400 per annum. It is not surprising that they should have cast about for a sensational spectacle that would draw the town, and perhaps recoup them for the heavy loss. It is so easy for the self-appointed high priests of "Art for Art's sake" to decry such motives. Kemble must have derived some comfort for his soul from the purses of the multitudes who flocked to see *Bluebeard*, in the second act of which—

"sixteen most beautiful horses, mounted by

* First produced at Covent Garden in December, 1791.

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Spahis, suddenly appeared before the spectators, and were received with immense applause; and when they were afterwards seen ascending the heights with inconceivable velocity the audience were in raptures, as at the achievement of a wonder."

The present chronicler is happy to be able to relate that, in spite of the dismal wailings of the Genests of the day, the play was a great success, and was acted forty-four times in the season, and that in spite of the worthy critic's sarcastic remark to the effect that—

"the dressing-rooms for the new company of comedians were probably under the orchestra, for in the first row of the pit the stench was so abominable that one might as well have sitten in a stable."

The early spring of 1811 saw a notable recruit to the Covent Garden staff in the person of its new musical director, Henry Bishop. The future composer of "Home, Sweet Home" was at this time twenty-five years of age. He had already written ballets for the King's Theatre and Drury Lane, which had met with some success. His agreement with the Covent Garden directors was for three years, and its first fruit was a musical drama entitled *The Knight of Snowdon*, founded upon Sir Walter Scott's poem, "The Lady of

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the Lake." His music to an indifferent libretto displayed an amount of talent, we are told, "seldom surpassed by British composers."

The so-called oratorios commenced this year on March 1, and again included Madame Catalani among the artists. She sang "Holy, Holy," and "The Soldier tired;" and Mrs. Dickons (formerly Miss Poole) "Sweet Bird," by Handel, both of which were encored.

On June 11 Mrs. Jordan first appeared as a regular performer at the new theatre, although she had acted for benefits in the old building. On this occasion she appeared in *The Country Girl*, one of her greatest successes. Other members of the company, besides Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, were Munden and Fawcett, the comedians, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kemble, Blanchard, Mrs. Weston, Miss Bolton, Mrs. Davenport, Barrymore, Farley, Brunton, Miss Booth, Mrs. Johnston, Grimaldi, and, last, but not least, Charles Young. The season was a long one.

On July 25, at a benefit "for the relief of the British prisoners in France," Catalani sang, and *Hamlet* was performed, with an afterpiece by "Monk Lewis," called *Timour the Tartar*.

1811-12. The pantomime produced this season, entitled *Harlequin and Padmanaba*, achieved a certain notoriety by the appearance of an elephant on Covent Garden stage for

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the first time, a feat, says Genest, contemplated years before by Christopher Rich, but never carried into effect by him. According to the Rev. Julian Young,* Henry Harris had purchased it in July, 1810, for 900 guineas. Mrs. Henry Johnston was to ride it, and Miss Parker, the Columbine, was to “play up” to it. In 1814 the elephant was sold to Cross, the proprietor of the menagerie in Exeter Change, and, it is melancholy to relate, afterwards went mad, and was shot.

* “Memoir of Charles Mayne Young.”

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CHAPTER XII

1811–1819

THE great event of the 1811–12 season is, of course, the retirement of Mrs. Siddons.

The great tragic actress was at this time in her fifty-sixth year. She had for long striven to attain a certain modest competence which should enable her to face old age with equanimity and in comfort, and to leave her beloved daughters independent of the buffets of fortune. This she had succeeded in doing, and though it can hardly be said of her that she lagged superfluous on the stage, she was certainly a veteran. Moreover, she was becoming increasingly aware of the advance of that insidious foe to the actor and actress—stoutness. For proof of this we have but to refer to the many caricatures of her published before and during the riots, where she is invariably depicted, although, of course, with a certain exaggeration, as a corpulent woman. According to a contemporary account of her published after her death, her first public appearance had been made at Worcester, February

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12, 1767, in a play entitled *King Charles I.*, with the following cast : Fairfax, Kemble ; Duke of Richmond, Siddons ; Duke of York, Master J. Kemble ; Duke of Gloucester, Miss F. Kemble ; Lady Fairfax, Mrs. Kemble ; The Young Princess, Miss Kemble.

In the April following Master J. Kemble was announced as Philadel, and Miss Kemble as Ariel. She is said to have been born on July 14, 1755. Her real *début* was made at Drury Lane in 1775, although she had toured in the provinces, probably with her father's and brother's company.

Genest says of her that on her return to Drury Lane in 1782 she was "universally allowed to be the first actress who had ever trod the English stage." In tragedy she may be fairly considered as equal to Garrick, his superiority in point of voice being balanced by her superiority in point of figure. In comedy Mrs. Siddons did not shine conspicuously.

I cannot here forbear to quote a contemporary appreciation of the great actress, also quoted by Genest. It is from a pamphlet by Ballantyne, published in Edinburgh in 1812, and the sentiments it conveys, as well as the language with which it is clothed, are alike worthy of the majestic and unequalled actress who was and is the glory of the English stage.

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“We have lost,” says Ballantyne, “and for ever, an artist whose performances rendered appropriate praise either difficult or unnecessary, and adequate praise impossible. Future times may wonder at, and perhaps doubt, in their honest love of some contemporary favourite, the magic wonders delivered to them by the present age of the powers of Siddons, but we can only say, and, we think, truly say, that no sculptor or painter, in the sublimest flights of his fancy, ever embodied—no poet, in the most luxuriant indulgence of his imagination, ever described—a creature so formed, so gifted, to agitate, awe, and astonish mankind by her professional powers, as her whose matchless form, face, voice, and eye are now finally withdrawn from our public admiration.”

It only now remains for the present writer to briefly chronicle the events of her last season. She played, of course, a round of her finest characters, including Lady Macbeth, Mrs. Beverley, Constance, Elvira, Euphrasia, Queen Katharine, the two Isabellas, Belvidera, Hermione, Volumnia, and Mrs. Haller. Mr. Fitzgerald quotes her as saying to Mr. Piozzi that she felt “as if she were mounting the first steps of a ladder conducting her to the other world.”

The great night itself was fixed for June 29, 1812. The play chosen was *Macbeth*. She sustained the tremendous character, we are told,

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with all her wonted power, and at the close of the last act but one, upon her final exit as the Queen, a section of the audience, following a complimentary custom sometimes accorded to great actors at their farewells, insisted on ending the performance. The implied tribute, if somewhat inartistic, is certainly graceful and eloquent. After the fall of the curtain she changed her dress, and then, attired in white, made her appearance to speak a farewell address, written for the occasion by her nephew, Horace Twiss. This was a really fine and poetic piece of verse, and is preserved for us in Mr. Fitzgerald's "Lives of the Kembles." The last stanza has been frequently quoted—

“ Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
May think on her whose lips have poured so long
The charmed sorrows of your Shakespear's song—
On her who, parting to return no more,
Is now the mourner she but *seemed* before ;
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last farewell.”

Three other notable events took place in the season. The first was the production, on January 31, of Bishop's second opera, *The Virgin of the Sun*, to a libretto translated by Reynolds from the German of Kotzebue. Genest speaks of the introduction of an earthquake in the first act, “the effects of which were exhibited in a very striking manner.” The second was the



MRS. SIDDONS AS THE TRAGIC MUSE.

From the Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, engraved by H. Dawe.

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revival by Kemble of *Julius Cæsar*, and the third was the conclusion of an agreement, through George Robins, as intermediary, with Charles Mathews, the comedian, for a five-years' engagement.

Charles Mathews made his appearance * at Covent Garden on October 12, 1812, as Buskin in *Killing no Murder*. He was at this time in his thirty-sixth year, and had been an established public favourite in the provinces for some fourteen years. His last engagement had been given him by the eccentric yet kind-hearted Tate Wilkinson, York and Leeds manager, whose death, sincerely lamented by his entire company, had but recently occurred.

During 1812-13 the new theatre of Drury Lane was opened, but with a company still considerably inferior to that of the rival house, in spite of Covent Garden's permanent loss of Sarah Siddons and the temporary retirement of Kemble.

The retirement of Mrs. Siddons has been spoken of as permanent, but she made several more isolated appearances at Covent Garden, which will be noticed in their proper places.

During this season she appeared once as Mrs. Beverley for a "triennial benefit for the aged and

* See 1805 for Mathews's only previous appearance at Covent Garden.

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infirm actors and actresses, and the widows and children of such as have belonged to Covent Garden." On this occasion Mrs. Jordan also played. Some of Kemble's characters this season were played by his brother Charles with considerable success. On June 12, Betty, who had made such a sensation as a boy prodigy, appeared at Covent Garden in *Richard III.* as a young man, and met with only scant success. During the season (April 9) the now familiar subject of *Aladdin* was brought forward as a melodramatic romance with great success. Mrs. Charles Kemble played Aladdin, and the part of Kazrac was taken by Grimaldi, becoming one of his most popular characters.

On July 2 a benefit was given "for Mr. and Mrs. Bishop." Bishop, the new musical director, had married as his first wife a Drury Lane actress named Lyons.

1813-14. The season opened well, and a conspicuous success was scored by Bishop's new opera, first produced on October 21, 1813, *The Miller and his Men*, which was written to a libretto by Pocock. On December 14 *The Beggar's Opera* was revived, cut down to two acts, with Miss Stephens as Polly, and Incedon as Macheath. The pantomime for the year was *Harlequin and the Swans*, in which Ellar as a harlequin made his first appearance at the theatre.

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According to Bunn,* on December 17, 1813, the Covent Garden proprietors sold the original Killigrew's patent to the Drury Lane directors, at a price which he does not mention. This did not affect their own position as the holders of the Davenant patent, under which Covent Garden was opened and worked.

A name that was to become famous in theatrical annals appears in the bill for October 7, when Mrs. Faucit, *née* Harriet Diddear, took the part of Desdemona. On November 15 following Cleopatra was played by her, her name being spelt by Genest Fawcit. The stage manager of Covent Garden at this time was Fawcett, but he does not appear to have been connected with her husband, J. S. Fawcit, or Faucit, who was a low comedian in the Covent Garden company.

On February 1, 1814, a new comic opera, *The Farmer's Wife*, by C. Dibdin, was produced. The music was supplied by no less than six composers, including Bishop. Sinclair introduced Bishop's "Love has Eyes," and Miss Stephens also sang.

During this year the name of John Parry, father of the famous John Parry of later years, became known as the composer of music to *Oberon's Oath* performed at Covent Garden theatre.

* Vol. ii. p. 281.

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The theatrical event of the season, however, was the reappearance, on January 15, 1814, of Kemble, when he acted *Coriolanus*, after an absence of about two years, which he had spent travelling. His biographer tells us that he had for some time been a martyr to gout. "Often he was found groaning in torture in the green room, and had to be assisted to the wing, but once on the stage his fortitude was amazing, and no one could have guessed how much he was suffering." Added to this, which was a premonition of old age and the inevitable retirement, was the appearance of the great new star, Edmund Kean, at Drury Lane, to which the fickle public rushed like the Athenians of old, ever on the look-out for something new. Fortunate indeed was "Old Drury" to secure a genius of such magnitude to support its falling fortunes, and curious the see-saw of fate which tilted those of Covent Garden to a low level for so many years.

Curiously enough, a great actress now made her appearance, in time, it would seem, to wear the mantle of Mrs. Siddons. This was Miss O'Neill, who at the beginning of the year 1814 was acting in Dublin, and who enters into our chronicles in the ensuing season.

However, Kemble played for a number of nights up to the end of May. The company then also included Miss Stephens (afterwards

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Countess of Essex), who was renowned for her good looks, and who had appeared in the "nick of time" to step into the place about to be vacated by the ever-fascinating Dorothy Jordan. The latter took her farewell on June 1, playing Lady Teazle to Fawcett's Sir Peter, Terry as Sir Oliver, Young as Joseph Surface, Liston as Sir Benjamin, and Mathews as Crabtree.

Towards the end of the season a gala performance was held in honour of the visit of the Allied Monarchs, the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia; and on July 15 the season ended.

Very shortly afterwards, on July 25, occurred the death of one whose earliest efforts had been connected with Covent Garden, in the person of Charles Dibdin. He died, it is sad to relate, in very embarrassed circumstances, the result, it is to be feared, of his utter incapacity to manage his own affairs to advantage.

Boaden mentions that subsequently to Kemble's reappearance he made a stipulation that he should dress in his own room, an honour gladly conceded by Fawcett, the stage manager, by whom he was held in affectionate respect. Mrs. Jordan's regular connection with Covent Garden had not been of long duration, her first engagement dating only four years before; but she had been a conspicuous London favourite for nearly

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thirty years. This is not the place, even if space permitted, to recapitulate the romantic episodes of her life, which may be studied by those who are interested in *chroniques scandaleuses* and court intrigues. She retired to St. Cloud, near Paris, where she died two years later, at the early age of fifty.

Genest's opinion of her was that—

“as an actress she never had a superior in her proper line. Mrs. Clive no doubt played Nell as well as Mrs. Jordan; it was hardly possible for her to have played the part better. . . . In breeches parts no actress can be put into competition with her but Mrs. Woffington.”

The matter-of-fact Rev. Mr. Genest further informs us that “though she was never handsome, . . . she sported the best leg ever seen on the stage.”

An instance of the discriminating generosity shown by Henry Harris is related in Mrs. Mathews's delightful memoirs of her husband. He had met with a driving accident in the summer of 1814, which laid him up for several months, and occasioned a temporary embarrassment in his finances. Again the good offices of their mutual friend George Robins were called into requisition, and an advance of salary amounting to £50 arranged, which, needless to

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say, proved extremely useful. It is sad to relate that the result of his unfortunate accident was never entirely eradicated. His wife says that he suffered from incurable lameness for the remaining twenty-five years of his life.

In July, 1814, the death occurred at Walton-on-Thames of Signora Anna Storace, who, thirteen years before, had delighted the patrons of Covent Garden Theatre by her singing in Mazzinghi and Reeve's operas.

The great event of the 1814-15 season at Covent Garden was undoubtedly, as we have stated, the appearance of Miss O'Neill as Juliet, on October 6. Dowered with a face and figure of exquisite and singular loveliness, in addition to her rare and conspicuous talents, she at once took very high rank in her profession. During the season she acted many of her immortal predecessor's parts, such as Isabella, Belvidera, etc., with great success, on several occasions with Kemble himself in the cast.

A new two-act opera, called *John of Paris*, appeared on November 8, the music by Boieldieu, in which Miss Stephens won great popularity.

The theatre this season suffered the loss of Incedon, after twenty-four years' service, during which it is recorded by him that he was never once heard to sing out of tune. He did not, however, know anything of music, but his

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memory was so retentive that when a piece had been once played to him he never forgot it.

An extract from Macready's diary for this year shows us how keenly the management were on the watch for new talent. Reports of his playing had reached London, and Harris at once despatched Fawcett, always a firm friend and admirer of Macready, to Bath to see the new actor, and report upon his qualifications and pretensions. An offer at once followed to play at Covent Garden, which was not, however, tempting enough to lure Macready to London, but a long correspondence ensued which eventually led to the *début* a year or so later.

On February 3, 1815, the popular comedian Charles Mathews returned to his duties at Covent Garden for the first time since his accident, although he was still very lame. As soon as his return was announced the boxes were all taken, and an enormous crowd of his admirers assembled. "When his voice was first heard from behind the scenes, as Buskin in *Killing no Murder*, the most universal applause commenced." * After a few weeks, however, poor Mathews was again obliged to take a rest, and so rode off to his favourite resort, Brighton, with his boy, the two travelling the whole distance on horseback, and greatly enjoying the trip.

* "Memoirs," by his wife.

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Later in the season he returned to work, and first essayed the part of Falstaff with great success.

During the 1815–16 season Kemble began in earnest his round of farewell performances. They were marred by two painful incidents, discreditable in the extreme to the audiences and critics who were guilty of them. One was the ungenerous comparison of the powers of a new, popular, and rising actor, Young, to the disparagement of the elderly and enfeebled man who courted their respectful sympathies by the memory of his past greatness, if for no other reason. The other was the behaviour of an audience to Kemble on the occasion of his last playing Sir Giles Overreach, when they unmistakably showed their preference for an Italian rope walker, whose performance followed the play.

On September 13, 1815, Charles Kemble reappeared after an absence of three years, as Macbeth. Later on he played Hamlet, and Romeo—to Miss O'Neill's Juliet.

On October 18 Mrs. Alsop,* a daughter of Mrs. Jordan, and a very fair actress, made her *début* at Covent Garden as Rosalind.

On January 17, 1816, a notable revival took place of *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, with musical additions by Henry Bishop.

* This lady's dramatic career was sadly brief; she died in 1821.

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During the oratorio season the only novelty was the appearance of T. Cooke, the violin player, as a principal singer.

On March 12 a dramatic adaptation of "Guy Mannering"* by Terry of Covent Garden was produced, and acted eighteen times. To this both Bishop and Attwood contributed some music. On April 23 a wonderful celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of Shakespear's death took place. Kemble played Coriolanus, and there followed a pageant of the whole of the poet's great characters, each taken by a prominent member of the company.

During the spring of this year Mathews, by permission of Mr. Harris, fulfilled some engagements in Edinburgh and Ireland during the run of certain pieces in which he did not perform, returning towards the end of the season.

The popularity of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* induced Harris to bring it out in English on May 20. The principal parts were sustained by Sinclair, Duruset, and Miss Stephens.

In March, 1816, Madame Sachi, or Saqui, a famous tight-rope dancer, "exhibited her unparalleled feats on several occasions," and it was doubtless this lady who, innocently enough, was the cause of the insult offered to Kemble on the occasion above referred to.

* Last played in London on February 17, 1883, at the Olympic.

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Mrs. Siddons reappeared on two occasions to gratify a wish of the Princess Charlotte of Saxe-Coburg. On the first of these she played with her brother in *Macbeth*, on June 8, 1816, and on the other she again acted in the same play to the *Macbeth* of Charles Young.

During the year 1816 Henry Harris made one of the few great mistakes that can be charged against his management of the theatre. This was the cancelment of the five-years' agreement with Charles Mathews, whose wife thus refers to it in her ever-delightful "Memoirs" of her husband:—

"Piqued and wearied by the ill-direction of his powers for nearly five years at Covent Garden Theatre, Mr. Mathews at last applied to Mr. Harris to relinquish further claim upon him for the remainder of his legal term. The request was yielded, apparently with the feeling of a person who, having long possessed a piece of musical mechanism by which he was first diverted and afterwards wearied, believing that all its tunes were played out, was glad to get rid of it at a small sacrifice."

While it is possible that Harris did not fully appreciate Mathews's extraordinary powers as a comedian, it must not be forgotten that at this time he was scarcely aware of them himself, and it was not until, to his own huge astonishment,

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the town went crazy over his "At Homes," in which his peculiar gifts of mimicry and ventriloquy found free scope, that he himself and his friends saw what immense possibilities of drawing money lay in these simple forms of entertainment.

In the following season, 1816-17, Kemble continued steadily playing his round of characters, and Macready made his first appearance as Orestes in the *Distressed Mother*.

His diary tells us of the difficulties attendant on his engagement. The Covent Garden managers were apprehensive of organized opposition to any one appearing in Kean's characters, which at once disposed of two of Macready's favourite impersonations, viz. Luke in *Riches* and Belcour in Cumberland's *West Indian*.

The "Cabinet" of the theatre, according to Macready,* at this time consisted of Henry Harris, Reynolds, the dramatic author, reader, and adviser, and Fawcett, the stage manager. Macready himself was made a party to their consultations on the perplexing choice of the opening play. This was much affected by the rumours concerning the existence of a mysterious club, "The Wolves," said to be banded together to put down any one appearing in Kean's characters. Eventually Orestes was fixed upon

* "Reminiscences," vol. i. p. 125.

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as being the least likely to provoke criticism. Events proved the wisdom of the choice, for the evening passed off without a hitch. Kean himself was present in a box, and Macready's future success assured.

A curious episode marked this season. This was the appearance of a provincial actor named Booth, who bore an extraordinary resemblance to Kean, and was even said to possess powers rivalling those of his celebrated prototype. He played Richard III. at a trial night on February 12, 1817, and was offered £8 a week for the season, which he declined. He was, however, billed for Richard again a few days later, an intention which was frustrated, as we shall see. The audience, who, as we know, took themselves and their rights very seriously in those times, conceived themselves offended by a somewhat foolish action on Booth's part. Intoxicated by the partial success of his first night at Covent Garden, he fell into a trap laid for him in the shape of an offer from Kean himself to play Othello to his Iago at Drury Lane. Before an immense audience, Kean exerted his prodigious powers to their fullest extent, with the result that the puny rival was extinguished and almost crushed out of existence. In a fit of pique he broke his Drury Lane contract and returned to Covent Garden. The Drury Lane managers

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published the circumstances, and the poor actor had to face a howling mob when he next faced the Covent Garden footlights. Eventually the management found Booth's acting so decidedly unattractive that after several abortive attempts to "boom" him he was dropped.

The new productions of the season included an operatic drama by Morton and Henry Bishop, entitled *The Slave*, and written round incidents of the slave trade in Surinam, at that time in full swing. Space must also be found to record an event of no less importance than the first dramatization of the immortal story of Robinson Crusoe, turned into a melodrama by Pocock, and produced with much success on April 7, 1817.* The character of Friday was taken by Grimaldi, and that of the hero by Farley.

Macready does full homage to the charm and popularity of the fascinating Kitty Stephens (afterwards Countess of Essex), already mentioned, who was an unfailing "draw" to an audience whenever and whatever she was playing.

"Criticism," says her brother actor, "is disarmed before her, and memory seems to take pleasure in lingering over her name, in recalling that fascinating power which . . . she, with

* This is the date as given by Genest. In Dickens's "Life of Grimaldi" it is given as April, 1816.

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apparent unconsciousness, exercised over her audience.”

During the season Mrs. Siddons made one of her now infrequent reappearances, as Lady Macbeth to Kemble's Macbeth, for the benefit of their brother Charles. This was, of course, an historic night, and the orchestra was removed behind the scenes to accommodate extra rows of stalls. Talma, the great French actor, was present, and Macready was, as a special favour, given a place in the third circle by Charles Kemble. He gives a melancholy account of Mrs. Siddons's acting, and expresses the opinion that she should not have attempted or been persuaded to a task which was then obviously beyond her enfeebled powers. Kemble only woke into life at the fifth act, and in a burst of inspiration ended the scene in perfect triumph.

His final and formal farewell was made as Coriolanus on June 23, 1817. Macready was not present, but Boaden was, and tells us that by no glance or failing tone was he reminded that it was Kemble's farewell performance until the inevitable and supreme moment came for addressing the audience in his own person, when he was “more affected than I had ever beheld him.”

Hazlitt, the incomparable essayist and critic, has left a vivid picture of the scene.

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“On his first coming forward to pronounce his farewell address, he was received with a shout like thunder. . . . Nor was he wanting to himself on this occasion. He played the part as well as he ever did, with as much freshness and vigour. There was no abatement of spirit and energy, none of grace and dignity. His look, his action, his expression of the character, were the same as they ever were ; they could not be finer.”

Dickens, in the “Life of Grimaldi,” mentions that a white satin scarf with a wreath was thrown from one of the boxes, which, falling short, dropped in the orchestra ; upon which M. Talma, the French tragedian, who was sitting there, instantly rose from his seat and placed it on the stage, amidst thunders of applause.

Boaden prints the entire speech, and mentions it as being literally transcribed from the great actor’s words.

“At its close he seemed to summon all his strength, and spoke with hurry and eagerness to be relieved. . . . Behind the curtain another trial awaited him, the performers, with whom he had so frequently acted, crowding about him to testify their respect for his talent and affection for his person. He was soon divested of the little properties that last adorned him on the stage.”

This is not the place to tell of the many honours that awaited him in his retirement.

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We shall again come across him briefly in 1821, when he made over to his brother Charles his share in the theatre, as lightly, says his biographer, Mr. Fitzgerald, as he had taken it up; but for the present his honoured name will be absent from our annals.

A reference is made in Bunn's "Memoirs" to an alleged quarrel during the year 1817 between Henry Harris and Charles Kemble, in which the former struck the actor, but the writer has found no confirmation of the statement.

Fawcett became stage-manager (on Kemble's retirement) at £200 per annum.

The greater portion of our materials are now drawn from the interesting, if sometimes wearisome, pages of Macready's reminiscences. They cannot fail to interest, for they tell, often vividly, of the inmost thoughts and experiences of an actor who occupied a prominent position at a critical period of English dramatic history. But his continual repinings at the disappointments he meets with, and his overweening consciousness of his own superiority to his surroundings, often render the work very tiresome and irritating.

A casual mention by him of Charles Farley, an actor in the Covent Garden company since 1782, reveals him as one of the directors of the theatre, a position he retained till 1834, his special

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duty being the production of the pantomimes. An interesting fact is gleaned from Genest, viz. that both the patent theatres from this time commenced their performance at 7 p.m., instead of half-past six.

On January 1, 1818, a new tragedy was produced at Covent Garden, entitled *Retribution*, by John Dillon, a very young man, and librarian of Dr. Simmons, of Paddington, the possessor of a fine collection of valuable books.

Although his maiden effort showed that he possessed considerable promise as a dramatist, he eventually abandoned literature for commerce, and became one of the founders of the famous house of Morrison, Dillon & Co., afterwards turned into the Fore Street Warehouse Company. It is curious that the son of his partner in the firm, the late Alfred Morrison, Esq., should have been widely known to literary men as the cultured and generous possessor of what was, perhaps, the finest private collection of MSS. and books in the kingdom.

Macready records a curious—and the superstitious would say ominous—occurrence during the run of *Retribution*.

We have before mentioned, in the description of the principal green room of the theatre, the large pier-glass, valued at £100, which stood over the mantel. Macready was swinging round a

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heavy battle-axe on his shoulder, as he was preparing to go on the stage, when the metal head flew off, and, dashing against the glass, shivered it in every direction. The fault was really the property man's; but in the morning Macready wrote to Harris expressing his readiness to undergo his liability for the accident. The manager, however, behaved with great consideration and liberality, limiting his share to only a proportion of the expense incurred in repairing the damage.

Scott's novel of "Rob Roy" had only shortly before been published, and an acting version of this was produced (by Pocock) on March 12, 1818, with great success, Macready winning much popularity in the title part. The music was partly composed and partly compiled by Davy.

On October 12, 1818, an adaptation of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, by Bishop, came out at Covent Garden with great success, Mrs. Dickons taking the part of Rosina.

Another somewhat noteworthy first night was Shiel's tragedy of *Balamira, or the Fall of Tunis*.

On June 16 a novelty, in the shape of one entire act from five different plays of Shakespear, was brought out. These were *Julius Cæsar*, act 3; *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 2; *Cymbeline*, act 2; *Henry IV.*, act 2; and

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Tempest, act 5. Alas for the incongruity of sublime and ridiculous, these five noble excerpts were followed by Madame Saqui, the Italian rope-dancer.

Macready relates an anecdote of some humour in connection with his own unpopularity at this time among his fellow-actors, of which he was well aware. It was greatly due to his own retiring habits, and to his impatience of the lackadaisical manner of his humbler associates at rehearsal. The famous actor Barry, it appears, shared these feelings, and on one occasion remonstrated with a country actor named Knipe on his incompetency.

“Do not speak your speech, sir, in that drawling way,” said Barry, energetically. “Look at me, sir, and speak it in this way: ‘To ransom home revolted Mortimer’—that’s the way to speak it, sir.”

To which Knipe immediately replied: “I know that, sir—that *is* the way, but you’ll please to remember you get a hundred pound a week for speaking it in your way, and I only get thirty shillings for speaking it in mine.”

During the year Mrs. Billington, the heroine of so many of the Covent Garden triumphs, died at her estate of St. Artien, in Venice, at the early age of 49.

Among the British Museum Additional MS.

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(29,365) there is a volume of “Musicians’ Agreements for the Covent Garden Band,” dated 1818–20, all signed by Bishop. Space forbids our quotation of more than the following :—

	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	
W. H. Kearns (leader in the absence of Ware, and repetiteur)	14	0	per night
John Mackintosh, bassoon	14	0	„
Wm. Parke, oboe	10	6	„
Chas. Wodarch, cello	10	0	„
J. Birch, flute	9	2	„
Thos. Wallis, trumpet and bugle-horn (and per night extra when required to perform on keyed bugle)	9	2	„
Thos. Brown, leader of 2nd violins	8	4	„

1818–19 found a strong and attractive recruit to the company in the person of William Farren, junior, son of the old tragedian of the eighteenth century, and “brother to Farren of Dublin and Bath.” He made his *début* on September 10, 1819, in a character which afterwards became identified with him—that of Sir Peter Teazle.

The Christmas pantomime of the season was entitled *Baron Munchausen, or the Fountain of Love*. A circumstance, related in “Grimaldi’s Life,” that occurred during the run of this piece is worthy of mention. Ellar, the Harlequin, had unintentionally offended one of the stage hands, whose duty it was to catch him as he jumped through the scenes. The man was heard to say he would be revenged, and on the third night he held the carpet in such a position that poor

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Ellar fell and broke his hand. The affair was then reported to Mr. Harris and Fawcett, who caused all the men to be assembled, and informed them that if Mr. Ellar would undertake to say he believed the accident was wilfully caused, they should every one be discharged on the spot. The kind-hearted Harlequin, on being told of the proprietor's intention, replied, without hesitation, that he could not believe it was intentional, and whispered to Grimaldi, as he left the house, that the fellow had got a wife and half a dozen children dependent on him. This truly Christian action on his part was the more praiseworthy as he had no doubt whatever on the subject, and had only by a miracle escaped with his life by falling on his hand instead of his head.

From Macready's account, we first now hear of the name of Alfred Bunn, afterwards to be so unfortunately connected with that of the tragedian. His wife was a Miss Somerville, a mediocre performer and member of the Covent Garden company. His injudicious efforts to "puff" this lady's abilities at the expense of Miss O'Neill nearly brought about an ignominious expulsion from the Covent Garden green-room, of which he had the *entrée*.

The novelties of the season included *Evadne*,*

* Last revived at the St. James's Theatre, March 19, 1887.

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a tragedy by Shiel, which met with some success ; *The Heart of Midlothian*, with Miss Stephens as Effie Deans, an interesting matter of which Macready's reminiscences make no mention ; and *Fredolfo*, a horribly blood-curdling tragedy by Maturin, at which an indignant theatre full of people rose in horror and fairly howled it off the stage.

The oratorios at Covent Garden this season were under the direction of Bishop, the theatre's musical director for operas. He entrusted the post of conductor to the able hands of Samuel Wesley, the famous church musician, at this time fifty-three years of age. W. Ware was leader, and Madame Bellochi sang.

We must not omit to notice the inclusion in the Covent Garden *répertoire* for the first time of Mozart's opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, on March 11,* 1819, under the direction of Bishop, when Mrs. Dickons, as the Countess, and Miss Stephens, as Susanna, both played and sang with immense success.

On May 31 the evergreen *Mother Goose* was revived, with additional scenes from *Munchausen*, *Gulliver*, and *Whittington* ; and Grimaldi this year first sang his celebrated song of "Hot Codlins."

* Genest gives the date as March 6, and says "this was little more than 'The Follies of a Day' degraded to an opera."

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June 9, 1819, was the occasion of the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kemble. The play chosen was *Douglas*, and for the last time in her life Sarah Siddons appeared as an actress, in the character of Lady Randolph. On this sadly historic occasion Macready played Glenalvon, and has fitly recorded that a gleam of the "original brightness" of her former greatness shone forth in one of the scenes, but it was, alas! only an expiring flicker. The rest of the performance of the great actress was dull and monotonous.

The close of the season saw the disappearance into another sphere of life of the beautiful Miss O'Neill, who said her farewell to the stage on July 13 as Mrs. Haller. She then became the wife of Mr., afterwards Sir, William Wrixon Becher, Bart., M.P. for Mallow.

During the year 1819 John M. Vandenhoff, the father of George Vandenhoff, and for many years the principal classical tragedian of his day, made his London *début* at Covent Garden Theatre, opening there as King Lear to the Edgar of Charles Kemble, the Cordelia being Maria Foote, afterwards Countess of Harrington, and one of the fascinating beings to whose charms all the men of her day fell captive. Without being a very beautiful woman, she yet managed to conquer the public by her

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grace, fascination, and loveliness. At the time of her marriage to the Earl of Harrington she was a member of Madam Vestris's company at the Olympic. Her admirer had asked Vestris to sup with him, and to bring an agreeable and lively companion with her. Madam Vestris brought Miss Foote, at that time about thirty-five years of age. The gay old nobleman fell a victim to her charms, and, greatly to the annoyance, it is said, of Madam Vestris, a fortnight later the fair Maria became Countess of Harrington.

END OF VOL. I





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